A HANDBOOK OF ASIAN SCRIPTS

THE BRITISH MUSEUM
A HANDBOOK OF
ASIAN SCRIPTS

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PREFACE

The languages of the world have for centuries provided scholars with a rich field for study and research. Of no less importance is the related study of the scripts in which those languages have been recorded.

This Handbook is designed as a companion to the exhibition of Asian scripts held in the King’s Library at the British Museum during July and August 1966. It sets out to provide a background to the exhibition by describing the principal systems of writing in use in Asia and North Africa. It also briefly traces their origins and historical development over the past two thousand years, with a glimpse at their interrelation one with another and the basic unity underlying many of them. It shows how certain scripts have travelled far from their place of origin, becoming adapted and assimilated to the needs of quite different languages on the way. Only the written languages of ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt have been excluded from the present exhibition, as they are already well represented elsewhere in the British Museum.

The compilers of this Handbook hope that it will not only provide a guide to the exhibition but also serve as a convenient short summary of the writing systems of Asia after the exhibition has been dispersed.

Thanks are due to the Keepers of Printed Books, Manuscripts, Western Asiatic Antiquities, British and Medieval Antiquities and Oriental Antiquities for lending material from their collections. We are greatly indebted to Mr C. A. Russell for drawing the diagrams.

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January 1966

I. INTRODUCTION

In the vast Asian and African land mass, many systems of writing are in everyday use by a large proportion of the world’s population. This exhibition illustrates the main classes, and traces the outline of script development over the last two millennia. Military and religious conquests have played an important part in the diffusion of scripts, and numerous adaptations and assimilations tend to obscure an original unity.

In all Asia there are very few independent systems of writing. If we take the Hebrew alphabet as a starting-point, we must begin from the form known as Phoenician or Canaanite, the origins of which are shown in the exhibition in the Room of Writing. From Phoenician through the spread of the Jewish and Christian religions, come Aramaic and Syriac, and through Greek, Coptic. A much greater flight is the spread of the Syriac form to Central Asia, where it represented a Turkish language, then Mongol, and finally Manchu, changing direction from horizontal to vertical. Central Asia, a rather vague frontier area, has used most of the script systems, but until modern times the Roman alphabet was not used. Now many newly-devised scripts are of the Roman or Cyrillic type.

Another great religious movement, Islam, carried the Arabic script as far as Malaya, with slight adaptations for such varied languages as Malay, Persian and Turkish. Principally a cursive script, Arabic has also had an important influence on shorthand systems in our own culture.

Going back again to Aramaic, and comparing the forms with the most ancient Indian system known to us, we find a striking similarity. Even if the steps cannot now be demonstrated, there does seem to be some link between a Semitic system and the Brahmi script. Religious, political and cultural forces over three millennia gave a proliferation of forms all derived from the one source, extending with the spread of Buddhism into South-east Asia, where it came to be used even for monosyllabic languages like Thai and Burmese. In early times the script was used in Central Asia for languages distantly related to our own.

For the rest of Asia, the Chinese script has been in use, and remained constant in form over a constant area, for two millennia, except for present-day Vietnam and North Korea, which have adopted different scripts for their national cultures. Japan and South Korea have adopted double systems in which the main ideas are represented in Chinese characters.
II. THE SEMITIC ALPHABET

1. PALAEO-HEBREW AND SAMARITAN

(Case 1)

Among the many systems of writing devised by man, undoubtedly the most useful and practical is the alphabet, in which an attempt is made to record the sound of a word by the use of symbols representing the distinctive sounds or 'phonemes' of a language. This is a great advance on any system using pictographs or ideograms and limits the number of symbols to the number of 'phonemes' of the language. The early Semitic alphabet only represented consonants, using twenty-two letters. In this alphabet the sounds of the letters for the most part represent the initial sound of the name of the object originally represented by the letter. Thus the second letter of the alphabet represents house, bet, so the sound of this letter is b. But not every letter has so far been satisfactorily explained in this way.

Our present English alphabet, which was taken over from Latin and which at an even earlier stage of development was used for writing Greek, was derived from the ancient North Semitic alphabet and it is in forms of this script that Hebrew, Samaritan, Arabic and Syriac, to name only a few languages, are written. Only one major Semitic language did not use the alphabet, Accadian, whose cuneiform writing was specifically adapted to writing on moist clay.

The origins of this alphabet are exceedingly obscure and lie largely outside the scope of this exhibition, since the earliest material is mostly written on stone or pottery, and is interestingly and informatively displayed in the 'Room of Writing' in the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities.

Some account, however, of the early days of the Semitic alphabet is necessary and the first thing to be pointed out is the division into South Semitic and North Semitic, a division which is evident from the earliest times. What the common origin of these scripts is has been a matter of considerable debate but it is generally agreed that Egyptian hieroglyphs and the inscriptions carved by Egyptian miners in the Sinai area played an important part. The situation is well stated by G. R. Driver, who suggested 'that the South-Semitic and North-Semitic alphabets were influenced by the Egyptian hieroglyphs, possibly through a common ancestor or ancestors, and were evolved in their earliest stages in close
contact with one-another. The intermediate link may have been the Sinaitic and probably also some early Canaanite form of the North-Semitic alphabet that preceded its branching off into the specific Phoenician and Aramaic, Hebrew and Moabite alphabets' (Semitic Writing, London, 1954, page 147). The earliest stage of the North Semitic alphabet must have been in the first half of the second millennium B.C., for by the second half we have the earliest connected Phoenician inscriptions coming from Byblos near Beirut.

In Canaan the earliest intelligible connected inscription is the Gezer Calendar, probably dating from the eleventh century B.C. (the period of Saul and David of the Bible). The script is very similar to the Phoenician though each of these developed more cursive forms, i.e. forms more easily written, especially with the pen, as time went on. This is clearly seen in our earliest example exhibited, one of the Lachish ostraca or potsherds used like scraps of notepaper, and which date from the fall of the city of Lachish to Nebuchadnezzar about 587 B.C. This in fact is relativly late in the history of what is called the Palaeo- or early Hebrew script which by the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls (the last few centuries B.C.) had gone out of use except for the practice in some manuscripts of using it to write the divine name יְהֹוָה. Fragments of the book of Exodus in the Palæo-Hebrew script have also been found at Qumran but by this time Hebrew was normally written in a form of the Aramaic script, another branch of the North Semitic alphabet, which had developed into what is commonly known as 'Square Hebrew'.

The Palæo-Hebrew script was revived on coins of the Maccabaean and Bar Kokhba period (2d. 140 B.C.—A.D. 135) and then died out as a Jewish script. The Samaritans, however, used a form of the Palæo-Hebrew script from the earliest days of the sect until the present. There is very little discernible development in the Samaritan script though this is no doubt due to the scarcity of early material, since the bulk of Samaritan material remaining to us was copied in the present millennium. There are two quite distinct styles of writing, however, the Majuscula which is bold, angular and elegant and the Minuscule derived from it though not very clearly. The latter is quite cursive and can be very difficult to read. A modern cursive hand is shown along with a very elegant manuscript in the Majuscula character.

Mention has been made of the Jewish use of the Aramaic script. An older example of this is to be seen in the fifth century B.C. papyrus fragment from Elephantine, an island on the Nile near Assuan. The Aramaic script is a main branch of the North Semitic alphabet, the other branch being Canaanite which has already been mentioned.

Aramaic writing goes back to the early centuries of the first millennium B.C. and by the second half of that millennium had become the most widespread and important script of the Near East. It was used by the western provinces of the Persian Empire as its diplomatic script and continued in use here and there until about the second century A.D. The Aramaic language, however, in both Western and Eastern (Syriac) varieties, has continued to be spoken to the present day in villages in the neighbourhood of Damascus, Mosul and Lake Urmia. The script developed by the Jews in Palestine for writing Hebrew as in the Dead Sea Scrolls is a variety of the Aramaic script influenced by the Palæo-Hebrew script and becoming standardised just before the beginning of the Christian era. This is the well-known Hebrew 'square' script dealt with in another section.

The Aramaic script is important not only in itself but for the scripts derived from it, notably Arabic via Nabataean, Syriac, Mandaeic and the scripts of many non-Semitic languages of Asia and India.

2. THE ARAMAIC SCRIPT AND ITS EARLIER DERIVATIVES

HEBREW

(Chapter 3–5)

The Square Hebrew script as it is still employed today is derived from the Aramaic. In the period before the Babylonian Exile, Hebrew was the language of the Jews in Palestine and they wrote in the early or Palæo-Hebrew script. A marked change, however, took place in the post-exilic age. With the spread of Aramaic as the lingua franca of the Near East and the return of the Jews, who had adopted it during the Babylonian Exile, Aramaic gradually became the vernacular of the Jews in Palestine. Under the Achaemenid dynasty, when the Aramaic script became the official hand of the vast Persian Empire, the Palæo-Hebrew ceased little by little to be the script of daily use and was restricted to the writing of the Sacred Scriptures. Although employed concurrently with the new script for some centuries, the Palæo-Hebrew alphabet was gradually superseded by the Aramaic.

After the fall of Persia and the introduction of Greek for official purposes, the local Aramaic scripts tend to differentiate. The three sister scripts—Hebrew, Nabatean and Palmyrene—branch off from the Aramaic parent script to follow their own course of development. By the late third and early second centuries B.C., a distinctive Palestinian Jewish variety of the Aramaic script can be traced which may be
regarded as the prototype of what subsequently came to be known as the Ktishhah Ashkari, the Assyrian script or the Ktishhah Mrubbi, the Hebrew 'Square' script, which basically has remained unchanged to the present day.

Until recently the material at hand for the study of the evolution of the Hebrew script, especially in its early stages, was rather scanty. Our resources, however, have been substantially increased by the discovery of a large quantity of manuscripts in the Judean Desert, the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. The caves of Wadi Qumran have yielded a collection of biblical and sectarian manuscripts, on leather and papyrus, ranging in date from about mid-third century B.C. to the late first century A.D., thus greatly expanding our knowledge of the evolution of the Hebrew script. We have here fragments of the oldest biblical manuscript in existence (4QEn), written in a proto-cursive script of the mid-third century B.C. as well as the earliest known example of the Hebrew Square script, fragments of a Samuel Scroll (4QSam), dated to the late third century B.C. Other stages of development of Hebrew writing are illustrated by manuscripts assigned to the Hasmonean and Herodian periods. An extension of the material from Qumran is afforded by important documents and texts of the late first and early second centuries A.D. found in the region of Wadi Murabba‘at. They include for the first time dated material enabling us to attribute the whole group to the time of Bar Kokhba, the leader in the Second Jewish Revolt against the Romans (A.D. 132–135), and contributing greatly to the establishment of the sequence of evolution of Hebrew writing.

In the evolution of the Hebrew Square script the following phases can be distinguished. In the early phase (ca. 200–150 B.C.) the script is related to the Elephantine papyri of the fifth century B.C. and the contemporary Aramaic papyri found at Edfu in Egypt. It is square in character but archaic in that it shows a wide differentiation in the size of the letters, a characteristic of the Aramaic hands of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. The real formative period is the Hasmonean phase (ca. 150–30 B.C.). With the decline of Greek and the resurgence of Aramaic and especially Hebrew as the official languages of Judea in the era of the Macrabean rule, a characteristic style rapidly develops from the early book hand. The letters still differ in size but there is a tendency to uniformity. In the Herodian phase (ca. 30 B.C.–A.D. 70) the script finally attains uniformity in size and a constant shape of letters, the use of final and medial forms, with some exceptions, being strictly observed. The evolution of the script in that period is very swift, so that early and late Herodian formal hands are easily distinguished. The elegant formal hand of the early Herodian period inclines to delicate, thin-lined forms, whereas the script of the late Herodian period exhibits a characteristic thick ductus and a squat form. The letters, normally large, have pronounced thickened heads which later become a characteristic feature of the Hebrew script. In the biblical manuscripts from Murabba‘at of the post-Herodian period (ca. A.D. 70–150) this 'ornamental' script, slightly developed, is widely used for copying the Scriptures and is also attested by some non-literary documents. It is this stylised formal hand which becomes the archetype of the medieval official biblical book hand. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the establishment of the Canon of the Bible, the standardisation of the text reaches its final stage and the 'canonisation' of the script for biblical manuscripts takes place. In contrast with the swift evolution of the script in the preceding three centuries, the standardised script henceforth undergoes little change. Detailed rules concerning the copying of Synagogue scrolls and the manner in which they should be set out grew up, preventing further development. Not until later in the Byzantine period were these rules written down, but we can now see that the later 'Masoretic' or Received Text and the rules concerning its transmission had practically attained their final form already at the beginning of the second century.

In common with other Semitic languages, the Hebrew alphabet consists of consonants only, which makes the reading in many cases ambiguous. To obviate such ambiguity various methods were developed. At first some of the consonants (aleph, bet, vav, zayin) served as both consonants and vowels. But since these vowel-letters or mater lectionis were not sufficient to mark all the different vowel sounds, especially as Hebrew speech passed out of daily use, a method of indicating vowels by separate signs added to the consonants began to develop parallel with similar attempts in other Semitic languages, notably Syriac and Arabic. Three distinct systems of Hebrew vocalisation developed, the Palestinian and Babylonian (both supralinear) and that known as the Tiberian (sublinear) which eventually superseded the others and is the one used today.

Very few codices exhibiting the early systems of vocalisation have survived but a number of fragments have been preserved mainly in the Cairo Genizah. Hardly any Hebrew manuscripts remain from the period between the Murabba‘at finds (second century A.D.) and the ninth century. This brings us to the period of the great biblical codices of the ninth and tenth centuries. A fine and important manuscript, which not only exemplifies the Tiberian type of vocalisation but also exhibits a distinctive calligraphic style of script for biblical codices in the Middle Ages, is MS. Or. 4445. It is one of the earliest biblical codices in
existence, and is assigned to the early tenth century. By this time two
other significant styles of writing were developing from the Square
Hebrew script—the Rabbinic and the cursive scripts. The Rabbinic
or Manuscript is a smaller semi-cursive script. Originally used for
commentaries and marginal notes, it later became the medieval literary
hand. It is of a somewhat rounded character with the heads of the
letters smaller or disappearing altogether and with modification of some
of the letters, making it more easily and rapidly written. Though there
is not always a clear distinction between the Rabbinic and cursive hand,
the cursive is a more current hand whose primary purpose has always
been for popular general handwriting and notes. From the Middle
Ages, with the wide diffusion of Hebrew literature throughout the
Jewish Diaspora, the development of these three styles of script has
been according to regions, and within any region the local national
script has tended to influence the Hebrew script. In Europe Hebrew
penmanship was brought first to the countries of the southern coast,
more especially to Italy and Spain, and spread thence into France,
Germany and other countries, assuming various modifications in its
course. With the Sephardi (Oriental-Spanish) Jews the Hebrew alphabet
is distinguished by its roundness and by the small difference in thickness
of the horizontal and vertical strokes. A fine example of a Spanish
Hebrew square script is MS. Or. 2626–8, a Hebrew Bible written in
Lisbon in 1482 A.D. Among the Ashkenazi (Franco-German) Jews, the
script is more angular with thinner down-strokes and with bent and
pointed lines (Add. 14762). Holding a midway position between these
two main regional styles are the Italian (Add. 11421) and Southern
French hands, which, though having a character of their own, are
closer to the rounded Sephardi forms. The differences visible in the
square alphabets are much more apparent in the Rabbinic scripts of
various countries and centuries.

From a variety of local cursive scripts, that of the nineteenth-century
Polish-German Jews has gained supremacy as the standard Hebrew
handwriting of Israel and the Jews in general. The Hebrew alphabet
has also been used by the Jews from an early period for writing such
languages as Persian, Arabic, Spanish (Ladino), Greek, Turkish,
Italian, Old French, German and Yiddish.
The Aramaic language had become widespread in the Achaemenid empire, and when once more a dynasty of Iranian stock ruled over Persia, the Aramaic alphabet was used to write Middle Persian or Pahlavi. The gradual reduction of the twenty-two consonants of the Aramaic script to only fourteen made the writing one of the most imperfect and ambiguous ever known. For example, one and the same letter stood for $r, s$ and $z$, and the signs for $a$ and $b$ were identical. In addition to this there were various ligatures and Pahlavi was encumbered by a system known as $Ugandash$ in which obsolete Aramaic words were used as ideograms to express Pahlavi words. Thus the royal title $Shahanshah$ 'King of Kings' was written $mlk-na mlk$ ($malkāna malkā$); and $nhr$ 'bread' was expressed by the Aramaic $dlm$ ($dln$).

The earliest variety of the Pahlavi alphabet, the Pahlavi or North-western, is also called Arsacid, after the name of the Parthian dynasty which reigned from 248 B.C. to A.D. 226. It appears mainly on coins and seals of this period. The South-western Pahlavi or Pāršik is usually known as Sasanian. This was the name of the line of kings which overthrew the Parthians and reigned until the Arab conquest. The writing of the South-western Pahlavi has a form for monumental inscriptions and a cursive hand. Of the Eastern Pahlavi, however, only a cursive form is known.

An improved version of the Pahlavi script called Avestan was evolved for the Zoroastrian scriptures which are in an archaic Iranian dialect. This was a great improvement on the Pahlavi and its fifty characters were better adapted to express an Indo-European language. The earliest manuscripts in this language have come down to us from the Parthian Empire in India and are not earlier than the thirteenth century. The document on parchment in Pahlavi (Or. 8115) is a certification before witnesses of the sale of a vineyard and dates from the first century B.C.

SYRIAC

(Case 2)

Centring round Edessa, Syriac was for many centuries the language of the Christians of North Syria and Mesopotamia and the Christian East in general. Along with Mandaic and the language of the Babylonian Talmud it belongs to the Aramaic branch of the Semitic family of languages. The Syriac scripts, too, are derived from the Aramaic, the earliest Syriac script having an especially close relationship to a cursive script found in some Palmyrene inscriptions of the second and third centuries of the Christian era.

This early script is known as Estrangela. It is a very beautiful, bold and elegant script, as can be seen from the exhibit in Case 2 (Add. 12110), which is the oldest dated Syriac manuscript known (A.D. 411) and probably the oldest dated codex still extant in any language. But the earliest examples of Estrangela script appear on coins from Edessa of the first century A.D., and the fact that the script had been used for four centuries before the earliest manuscripts appear may account for the beauty and clarity the script had developed by that time. It continued in use with fluctuations in popularity until the thirteenth century, since when it has been virtually extinct.

The rival of this script, which ultimately led to its disappearance, was the Jacobite or Sertă script, the earliest dated codex in which is dated A.D. 732 and contains the Gospel of John. In Case 2 (Add. 14548) is a very early example of the Jacobite script, being dated A.D. 790. This script was both graceful and easily written, a factor which no doubt gave it an advantage over the Estrangela form. It was extensively used down to the end of the sixteenth century.

After the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431 those Syriac-speaking Christians who followed the Nestorian doctrine separated from their more orthodox brethren and formed a distinct church organisation. As a result of this division the Estrangela script developed along different lines which became apparent by the end of the sixth century. By the middle of the thirteenth century cursive forms began to appear giving rise to a distinctive Nestorian script which has continued in use down to the present day. The example exhibited is the 'Bazaar of Heralclides', a work of prime importance in the Nestorian controversy.

The Nestorian Church was a great missionary church with the result that Syriac inscriptions have been found as far afield as Siam in Central China, where Nestorian Christianity flourished in the seventh and eighth centuries. The Nestorians also took Christianity to South India where to this day Syriac is used as a liturgical language and books are printed in Syriac type. Yet another group of Syriac-speaking Christians evolved their own form of the Syriac script, the Melkites of Palestine. The Melkites accepted the doctrine of the person of Christ as formulated at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 431 and those in Palestine had their own liturgy and version of the scriptures which they wrote in their own rather stiff and angular variety of the Estrangela character, using the addition of a special character to represent $p$ in words of foreign origin. In its earliest form this script is strongly influenced by the Greek Uncial character. Not much of this survives but a good
specimen of the tenth or eleventh century is exhibited in Case 2 (Add. 14664). The oldest dated example of this script was copied in Antioch in A.D. 1050.

**MANDAIC**

*(Case 2)*

The Mandaeans of Iraq, a gnostic sect with pagan, Jewish and Christian elements in their religion, possess a literature written in an Eastern Aramaic dialect somewhat influenced by Persian and Arabic. This language, Mandaic, is written in a script which seems to be derived from a cursive Aramaic script probably with some influence from Syriac. There are some quite old Mandaic inscriptions on lead and in earthenware bowls dating from the seventh and eighth centuries, but most of the available material is in manuscripts of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Examples of both an early inscription on lead and a manuscript of the later period are shown.

The early history of the Mandaeans is extremely obscure, but a small number of them still exists in southern Iraq, in the marsh districts of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

3. **CENTRAL ASIAN SCRIPTS DEVELOPED FROM THE ARAMAIC**

*(Case 19)*

**SOGDIAN**

The Persian religious leader Mānî (d. A.D. 276) himself improved the faulty and ambiguous Middle Persian writing by introducing the Syriac alphabet which he adapted successfully to Pahlavi. The cumbersome old ideograms (Uğurîsha) were largely abandoned and the new writing was used for Sogdian from which it spread to the Turkish peoples of Central Asia.

Sogdian, an Iranian language, used an alphabet of seventeen letters with two more special signs, every letter being written separately. At a later date the writing became very cursive as in the Uighur, the Turkish alphabet derived from the Sogdian. Buddhist works were written in a later and slightly different version of the Sogdian writing. It was less legible than the earlier script when η and ω were apt to be confused; now, to make matters worse, the signs for しようと では were practically identical. In all there were three scripts—one used for Buddhist works and ordinary purposes, another by the Manicheans and a third for Christian texts.

The earliest Sogdian manuscript on exhibition is Or. 8212 (95), one of a bundle of letters sent by merchants in China to their head offices at Samarkand. The date corresponds to June A.D. 315 in view of the events mentioned in it which were then of current interest. At this time the Sogdians were Zoroastrians but some were later converted to Buddhism. A fragment of a story about the Persian hero Rustam is written in this later Buddhist Sogdian alphabet (Or. 8212 (81)). Another letter, Or. 8212 (86), is an example of cursive Sogdian.

**UIGHUR**

Sogdian in its latest form was the parent of the Uighur writing, probably in the eighth century A.D. The Uighur letters were used by the Turkish Buddhists of Chinese Turkestan for nearly a thousand years. The latest manuscript, now in a Russian collection, is dated 1687. It was never a very good instrument for writing Turkish, especially when the dots which distinguished certain letters were omitted. Uighur usually reads from right to left, but when it is written in columns reading from the top downwards, it reads from left to right.

Early Uighur is a handsome script. Or. 8212 (104), which was discovered at Tunhuang, is a fine example from this early period. It contains a popular but apocryphal Buddhist sutra called Șehîz Ȳhâyâ. The later development of this writing into a cursive hand is shown in Or. 8212 (109) which bears a Chinese date in a year period corresponding to A.D. 1350. The work is a Buddhist religious book of tantric content, translated almost literally from the Tibetan.

When the Turks of Kashgar and areas to the west of it were converted to Islam, they abandoned the Uighur alphabet in favour of the Arabic. The Uighur script was not forgotten, however, and even underwent a revival under rather peculiar circumstances. Until the late twelfth century, Mongol had never been a written language, but when Chinggis Khan became a world conqueror, he decided that he must have an official alphabet. He commissioned a learned Uighur to devise one for him out of his own writing. Thus Uighur became the common hand not only for Mongol under the Mongol rulers but also for Turkish under the Turkish or Turkish-speaking viceroy who carved kingdoms for themselves out of the ruins of the Mongol Empire. This revival in Western Asia lasted from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries.

Or. 8193 is probably the finest extant example of this ‘second’ Uighur alphabet. It is a miscellany containing poems and religious works written and illuminated for a Turkish prince in the Persian city of Yezd in A.D. 1437–8. The calligraphy is very fine but the alphabet has deteriorated as a vehicle for expressing sounds.
The Turkic languages are remarkable for the variety of scripts they have employed over the centuries. In addition to the Uighur and Sogdian letters, they have used the Indian Brahmi, the Tibetan and a special kind of Syriac writing adapted to Turkish. The latter is somewhat clearer than Uighur but was used only by the Manichaean. The example shown in Chart 5 is an almost complete copy of the Khvastanafs or Manichaen Confession of Sins (Or. 8212 (178)). Sometimes Uighur was printed from wood blocks as in contemporary Chinese books.

OLD TURKISH RUNIC

The earliest specimens of written Turkish are inscriptions on memorial stones scattered over Southern Siberia and Mongolia which date from the early eighth century A.D. These are written in an alphabet usually called 'Runic' because its letters resembled the Germanic runes, although there is no relationship between the two. There does, however, seem to be a connection with a script found in a few inscriptions in Transylvania and Southern Hungary called Szechler. The Turkish Runic alphabet was constructed by the Turks on the late Aramaic script, but there was clearly another source as well—possibly a degenerated version of the Greek alphabet. There is thus a parallel here with the Germanic runes, which are said to have originated in a garbled Latin script used by the Goths. The Turkish Runic alphabet was an advanced scientific script with thirty letters and from to six ligatures. Even though it left out almost all the short vowels and some letters did duty for two different sounds, it was the best system of writing used by the Turkic peoples until the adoption of the Latin alphabet in 1528.

The earliest of the Runic Turkish manuscripts in the British Museum collection belongs probably to a period before A.D. 770. It is a return of receipts into the quartermaster’s store of such things as breastplates and swords, and their issue to people with Turkish names or Chinese titles (Or. 8212 (75)). The manuscript is now in three fragments. A collection of proverbs (Or. 8212 (76-9)) is also in fragments but what remains indicates that it is the finest manuscript in the collection from a calligraphic point of view. Another fine example of Runic Turkish is Or. 8212 (161), a fortune-telling manual intended to be used with dice or knuckle-bones. The runes were written from right to left.

MONGOL

The Mongols used the Uighur as their official language and script until 1271 when an adaptation of the Tibetan writing called Hpa-si-pa (Pa-sci-pa in Mongol) was adopted for the Mongol language. This was replaced by a new script founded on the Uighur about 1310. The new Mongol
alphabet (Kalika or Galik) was used in the translations of the Buddhist scriptures and became widespread. It is written vertically in a downward direction like Chinese but the columns run from left to right. Like so many of the alphabets derived from the Aramaic, it has many imperfections—some letters (e.g., g, k, d and t, s and n, and y and f) are written alike and Mongol is a language with many vowels like Turkish which are not adequately expressed by the script.

Case 10 contains a copy of the Mongol-Chinese dictionary of rhymes, copied in the fourteenth century using the Pa-se-pa script. Before this date, however, the script was falling into disuse except in the case of seal inscriptions. Add. 27568 is a leaf from a Mongol book, showing the customary form of the Kalika script. It was probably copied in the eighteenth century.

The Mongol script reached the neighbouring people of Manchuria and was adapted to the Manchu language. It was improved in 1652 by the addition of some diacritical points. In 1748 the Manchu (Chi'ing) Emperor of China, Ch'i'en-lung, reformed the Manchu writing. Or. 6790 is part of the official history of the Manchu dynasty, compiled by the state historiographers. This volume (41 of the history) deals with the year 1832.

The Kalmuks, a branch of the Mongols, adapted the Kalika script to their own dialect in 1648. In general it was a great improvement on the ordinary Mongol writing. At a later date the Buryat Mongols took over the Kalika alphabet. A collection of vocabularies arranged according to subject in Manchu, Chinese and Kalmuk (Or. 6971) is dated about 1700.

These alphabets based on the Uighur continued in use until 1941 when the Russian Cyrillic letters, with some modifications, were introduced by the Russians for writing Mongol, as well as for the modern Turkeic languages. In China, on the other hand, the older type of writing still survives.

4. ARABIC

(Cases 7–9)

What is known today as Arabic script is more precisely North Arabic, and it is now generally agreed that this way of writing was developed from an alphabet used by the Nabataeans, an Arab people living to the north, east and south of Sinai. The Nabataeans used both Arabic and Aramaic, but their written language was mainly Aramaic. The oldest Arabic inscription that we have in Nabataean characters is dated A.D. 267. The Arabs appear to have had little use for writing and they are by no means the only example that the ancient world has to offer of a highly

language-conscious and poetically gifted people who were mostly illiterate. The Arab poets preferred to hand down their compositions by living word of mouth and each poet had at least two youths specially chosen for this purpose.

But with the coming of Islam, the need to record every syllable of the Koran with absolute precision imposed writing on the seventh-century Arabs and changed it from being an almost unnecessary side-line to an accomplishment of the highest importance. Moreover, since Islam discouraged the painting of pictures, the Arabs began to put much of their genius into calligraphy; and within less than two centuries after the beginning of Islam they had developed a calligraphic art which has never been surpassed.

In pre-Islamic times two different kinds of Arabic script had already developed, one ‘static’ and angular, and the other cursive and round. This last still continued to be used in Islam for ordinary ends, as is shown by the Egyptian passport on papyrus, dated A.H. 183 (A.D. 795), in Case 13. But the more monumental angular lettering was preferred for copying the Koran and other important purposes, and it was not long before several kinds of calligraphic scripts were developed from it, one in Mecca, for example, another in Medina, another in Kufa and yet another in Basra. Examples of Mecca and Kufic script, and of a derivative from each, are also to be seen in Case 13.

Meantime, since the Semitic alphabets do not include vowels, a system of placing vowel marks above or below the letters had been adopted on analogy with those used in Syriac script—Syriac being the liturgical language of the Arab Christians of those parts. The use of diacritical points to distinguish between otherwise identical letters had been previously adopted from Syriac.

The rounder, more cursive scripts by which the more angular scripts gradually came to be replaced for calligraphic purposes were developed directly from the angular scripts themselves and not from the already existing ordinary cursive hand. The presence of this hand may none the less have had a general influence on the development in question.

Between the square ‘static’ and the round cursive is a ‘triangular’ cursive script that is generally called ‘bent Kufic’ or ‘semi-Kufic’. This makes its appearance about A.D. 900. One or two examples, on vellum and also on paper, are to be seen in Case 7 together with a Koran of the year A.H. 427 (A.D. 1036), copied in a round hand which still retains a certain angularity.

By the time the Abbasid Caliphate was established in Baghdad in A.D. 750, calligraphy was well on its way to becoming one of the great arts of Islam. Among the most famous Near Eastern calligraphers were
Ibn Muqta (A.D. 886-940), Ibn al-Bawwab (d. 1022) and Yahyâ (d. 1298). By them and others many kinds of rounded cursive script, such as Thuluth and Nashi, were perfected. Most of the Arabic manuscripts shown in this exhibition are Korans, since they provide the finest and most distinctive examples of calligraphy. Some thirteenth-fourteenth-century Korans from Egypt, Palestine and Iraq are to be seen in Case 9. Most of these represent variants of that style of Thuluth which is known as Jâhil. It should be noted, however, that these rounder hands did not completely supersede the more angular ones which are still used to this day for stone and metal inscriptions, and which have been used throughout the centuries in books for such features as chapter headings. Examples of such headings are to be seen in some of these late medieval Near Eastern Koran manuscripts; and in Case 8 is a printed book, published in 1691 in Lebanon, which has no less than five different styles of lettering on the title-page, one of them being, as is often the case, archaic and angular.

What has been said so far applies only to writing in the Near East. But in less than a hundred years after the Prophet’s death the empire of Islam had spread to the Bay of Biscay in the west and to India and the confines of China in the east; and within this vast Islamic civilisation differences of race, temperament, climate and other factors inevitably brought into being several little civilisations, each a homogeneous whole in itself with its own special characteristics. One of these little ‘worlds’ was the Islamic civilisation of North-west Africa and Spain, which quickly developed a unique style of architecture and, side by side with it, a unique style of Arabic script known as Magribî, which means ‘Western’. It is perhaps not too fanciful to say that the honey-combed Andalusian and Moroccan architecture, with its extraordinary combination of airy lightness, robust vigour and inviting intimacy, is reflected in the Magribî script. Analogously, the Arabic scripts developed in India are an integral part of that particular Islamic ‘world’. The same may be said also of Central West African Arabic script, which was developed later from the Magribî but which differs from it in some-thing of the difference between the black race and the white. In Case 8 there are examples of Arabic written by Magribî, Indian and Nigerian calligraphers.

As regards writing, Persia and Turkey may be counted as part of the Islamic Near East, and some examples of Arabic script which are used by the Arabs, but which are not represented in the cases devoted to Arabic, may be seen in Turkish and Persian manuscripts (Cases 10-11).

PERSIAN AND TURKISH
(Cases 10-11)

With the rise of Islam, the Arabic script spread over a vast area and gradually superseded other systems of writing which were in use among the newly-conquered peoples. Among these was the Pahlavi alphabet which appears alongside Arabic on the earliest Islamic coins of Persia but soon died out except among those Persians who adhered to the ancient Zoroastrian faith. It was found necessary to modify some of the Arabic letters to express sounds not found in Arabic (e.g. p, ch, g and zh) by the addition of diacritical points but these were not much used until after the reign of Shâh Rukh (1404-47).

The two earliest Persian manuscripts in the Arabic character are the well-known Kâhid al-adârij of Abû Manṣûr Muyaṭṭ al-Ḫarawî at Vienna which bears the date A.H. 447 (A.D. 1053-6) and a medical work at Oxford dated 478/1085. The first of these is in an angular script very close to Kufic; the second is in a Nashi hand indistinguishable from those used in Arabic manuscripts of that period. There is a tendency among Persian copyists to write with a slope downwards from right to left which first occurs in some manuscripts of the twelfth century. Thus the Ta’lîh script developed which was at first used only for secular works, particularly poems, while the round Nashi was retained in more serious works.

Case 10 contains examples of early Persian manuscripts in the Arabic script. Or. 6288 is the second earliest dated Persian manuscript in the British Museum. It is a translation of an Arabic work on hygiene entitled Ṭakwîn al-fishâb by Ibn Butîlîn and is dated 517/1125. The hand is a very stiff Nashi and should be compared with the more cursive script of Or. 7942 (Divan of Khâğı, dated 664/1265-6) which is of a type usually employed for writing poetry and shows, surprisingly enough, a fairly consistent use of the diacritical points. In Case 12 the beginnings of the Ta’lîh script are to be seen in Or. 6410, a deed for the sale of land from Khotan, dated 101/1607-8. The same vowel points are used as in Arabic but they appear only very occasionally; usually only the long vowels are indicated in Persian.

Or. 11598 (Divan of Salmân-i Sâvâjî, dated 794/1393) shows a further stage in the development of Ta’lîh. This script first appears in its finest and most artistic form towards the middle of the fifteenth century. The Divan of Hâfîz Sa’d (Or. 11845) is a fine example of calligraphy, executed for the library of Pir Budâk, the son of the Turkoman ruler Jahânsâh Karaşoyunlu, at
The last phase in Persian writing was the evolution of the Shikasteh (literally 'broken') script from Nastaliq with the omission of diacritical points and the linking together of various letters which are not normally joined. An example of this cursive hand used for diplomatic correspondence is Or. 4679 (dated 1272/1855-6) which comprises copies of various treaties and conventions concluded by the Persian government with other countries. Or. 2953 (Vimik van 'Agri of Nāmī, dated 1262/ 1845-6) is a good example of the hand known as Shikasteh-durva which is a mixture of Nastaliq with more cursive forms. Shikasteh is the basic script for handwriting at the present day but it frequently inclines towards Shikasteh-durva. Various ornamental hands were devised for the use of calligraphers in elegant correspondence. Add. 2727 is an example of one of these—the Tarastil hand, and is dated 1225/1810-11. It resembles the Dihānī script which appears in Persian documents for the first time towards the end of the fifteenth century.

It is always difficult to assign a Persian hand to a particular locality or to be specific about its date. Generally speaking, a small neat Nastaliq appears in manuscripts copied at Shiraz ca. 1450-60; and after 1600 there is a steady deterioration in Nastaliq which becomes larger and coarser, whereas Naskh gradually improves after this date.

The Turks of Kashghar adopted the Arabic alphabet on their conversion to Islam and were using it for works, both sacred and profane, by the eleventh century. Turkish conservatism made hardly any alteration to the Arabic alphabet which was unsuitable for expressing the numerous vowels of Turkish and was replaced by the Latin letters in 1928. The last years of the Arabic alphabet in Turkey were characterised by an attempt to assign a vowel letter for every vowel but even this proved to be inadequate. Add. 7831 (Case 17) is an example of the Arabic character as used in Eastern Turkish in the fifteenth century. The hand is a Nastaliq, far from possessing any calligraphic merit, and the work is the History of the Prophets, translated from the Persian by Rabghūzī in 1530. The language represents an intermediate stage between the Middle Turkish works of the eleventh century and Chaghatai which had become the main literary language among the Turks of Central Asia by the fifteenth century. This copy does not use the special modified letter employed to express the i in words like sül 'water' which is found in some old copies of Middle Turkish works as well as in some archaic Persian manuscripts.

Most of the earlier manuscripts in Western (or Anatolian) Turkish which later developed into Ottoman Turkish are written in Naskhī. The only change made in the Arabic-Persian script by the Western Turks was the adaptation of the letter kā to express a nasal nā. This letter was sometimes distinguished by three dots. In the early example exhibited in Case 11, the vowels are indicated with the Arabic vowel-signs. In the fifteenth century the use of the vowel-signs began to decline but the Arabic letters of prolongation came to be used as vowel-letters right up to 1928. Or. 4126 is the only known copy of the Divan of Kādi Burhan el-Dīn, copied in 708/1306, two years before his death and bearing some corrections almost certainly in his own hand. The somewhat elongated letters appear in other early Anatolian manuscripts, notably one containing the works of the early fifteenth-century poet Aymedel Dīn. Sometimes the Naskhī contains numerous flourishes and is known as Ḥāidi or Tavitī. This is usually found only in ornamental headings.

The Divānī script, with its more elaborate form Celi, used for headings and title-pages, was used almost exclusively for official documents in Turkey. Add. 22135 (on the screen), a būrūd or exequatur granted at the request of the English Ambassador at the Porte to Samuel Bury, Consul in Cyprus, is dated 1088/1677. This is a fine example of an elegant Divānī hand and the document bears the Tūfārī or monogram of Sultan Mehmed IV. Or. 11559 (mounted on the screen) is one of a collection of four documents for the protection of the 4th Earl of Caernarvon, a Mr Burgess and Viscount Sandon on their travels through Turkey. The earliest is dated 1210/1854-5 and the latest, 1269/1852-3. Kırmız was the name formerly applied to all kinds of cursive Turkish hands. It was the Turkish equivalent of Shikasteh. When a hand is a small and cursive variety of Nastaliq or Divānī, the writing is called Tārīkh-īrma or Divānī-īrma. Harl. 1835, part of the selected letters of 'All Celeni Kuralzade, is a good example of seventeenth-century Divānī-īrma.

A variety of cursive script evolved by the Turks was the Rığ'-a. This became the ordinary handwriting not only for Turks but also for Arabs. Diacritical points are combined and all unnecessary strokes abbreviated so that it can be written rapidly. Although it is of late date (1268/ 1852-3), Or. 10897, a collection of historical works by Ahmed Resmi, is a good example of Rığ'-a copied by an educated person.

A peculiar type of writing without the diacritical points named Siyālāt was used in the Ottoman treasury accounts and documents.
URDU, SINDHI, PUSHTU AND MALAY

(Case 6)

In addition to Persian and Turkish, the Arabic script was adapted for many different languages, notably Urdu, Sindhi, Pushtu and Malay, but none of these developed characteristic scripts of their own.

A representative collection of manuscripts are in Case 6. The literary development of languages of Central Asia and the Indian Sub-Continent using the Arabic script was slow, as they were overshadowed by Persian which had a cultural development of many centuries behind it. In consequence there are very few early manuscripts in these languages.

The older of the two Urdu manuscripts on exhibition is a miscellany dated 1153/1740–1 to 1158/1745–6. It is open at a rhymed vocabulary of Persian words explained in Urdu, compiled in 992/1382 (Add. 5629). The language of the Romance of Ratan Sen and Padmavati (Add. 16880), composed by a poet named Hans, is a form of Deccani Urdu closer to Hindi. The manuscript was copied towards the close of the eighteenth century.

Or. 6575 is a collection of five poems in Sindhi, mostly religious in character. It belongs to the first half of the eighteenth century. The earliest known Pushtu manuscript, now at Tübingen, was copied in 1061/1651. Two manuscripts of early date in this language are in the British Museum. One of these (Or. 4228), copied in 1101/1690, contains the poetical works of Mirzâ Khan Ansârî.

A letter in Malay (Harl. Ch. 45 . A. 6) is attached to the screen. It is from the Raja Bendhahana Paduka of Birm to the ‘English Captain’ at Jambi. Both these places are in Sumatra. The date of this letter cannot be fixed with any accuracy but it is likely to have been written in the seventeenth century. The other document in Malay on exhibition is a proclamation by Sir Thomas Raffles (Or. 9484). It is dated September 12th, 1811. Like Turkish and Bahasa Indonesia, Malay is now written in the Latin alphabet.

5. SOUTH SEMITIC SCRIPTS

ETHIOPIAN

(Case 7)

The origin of the South Semitic alphabet has already been referred to. This is the script of the inscriptions in Ancient South Arabian, the language of the ancient South-west Arabian city-states which flourished from about the eighth century B.C. to the sixth century A.D. The script spread to Ethiopia and the oldest Ethiopic (Ge’ez) inscriptions date back to the first few centuries A.D. Of great importance are the fourth-century inscriptions of the Ethiopian Empire of Axum whose coins also illustrate the script over several centuries.

It has been mentioned that the Semitic alphabets only indicated consonants. In Hebrew, Arabic and Syriac, systems were devised for indicating vowels by additional points above or below the letters. In Ethiopic a different solution was found. The vowels were indicated by altering slightly the form of the preceding consonant. Thus a syllabary was formed, and since there were seven vowels indicated for each of the twenty-six consonants, Ge’ez had a total of 182 syllabic signs. This development is already discernible in some of the Axumite inscriptions and by the time of the earliest extant manuscripts it was a feature of almost a millennium’s standing, for very few Ethiopic manuscripts earlier than the fifteenth century have been preserved. We exhibit a very fine manuscript of the Octateuch (the first eight books of the Bible) dated to the fifteenth century (Or. 480) as an example of the older style of calligraphy. It will be seen that in comparison with the later examples this early form of script is rather spidery, yet it has an elegance that the later form seems to lack. The golden age of fine Ethiopic manuscripts was the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and our example (Or. 590) is a richly illustrated hymn-book of the eighteenth century. Amharic is the principal modern language of Ethiopia. It is written in the old Ethiopic script with certain modifications to indicate the additional ejective consonants of Amharic. The manuscript showing the modern development of the script is a medico-magical text in Ethiopic and Amharic (Or. 11390) extensively decorated with magical drawings. This script is in current use for writing and printing most of the languages of Ethiopia.
III. SCRIPTS ADAPTED FROM THE GREEK ALPHABET

1. COPTIC

(Case 12)

The Coptic alphabet consists of the twenty-four letters of the Greek alphabet supplemented with six or seven additional characters, according to dialect, derived from demotic, the cursive and rapid form of writing employing ancient Egyptian principles, which was in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods the ordinary writing of daily life. The word Coptic is also used to describe the language of the script: it is the lineal descendant of the ancient Egyptian tongue and is still spoken in the liturgy of the Coptic rite. This is the only stage of the Egyptian language in which speech sounds are satisfactorily represented by a purely alphabetic writing of both vowels and consonants.

Attempts to adapt the Greek alphabet for the writing of the Egyptian language were made in the first three centuries of our era, in school exercises where demotic lists of names and the like were given phonetic transcriptions in Greek letters, and in horoscopes and other magical texts which required for their efficacy the correct pronunciation of the names of demons and of the magical words of power. Coptic was not, however, used for regular literary compositions until the early fourth century when Christian, Manichaean, and Gnostic missionaries were active among the Egyptian-speaking element of the population, for whose use translations of the sacred books were made. Within another century, under Christian influence, the difficulties which arose in borrowing the alphabet of a foreign language were resolved and the conventions of the use of individual letters and diacritical marks standardised.

Of the Greek letters, gamma, delta, and zeta are rarely used in Coptic except in the writing of loan-words. The double letters theta, psi, and phi are used in the Sahidic dialect normally only to replace certain combinations of consonants but in the Bohairic dialect, which retains strongly aspirate forms, they are common. Fa'iyumic is the only dialect to use lambda regularly in place of rho. Sahidic makes no distinction between the sounds which are transliterated in ancient Egyptian b, h, ñ, ñ; it uses in all cases the 'h' sign bori. In Achamnic the two groups are distinguished: b and ñ are represented by bori, ñ and ñ by a barred

bori. In Bohairic the second pair is written with the zobi, a character peculiar to that dialect. The letters are also used to write the numerals: for 6 the Greek digamma is employed, for 90 the Coptic character fai and for 900 a barred form of rho.

At the time of the appearance of Coptic as a literary language, papyrus was still in common use. The roll persisted to the fifth century for certain types of text and the Middle Egyptian text of the Didache (Or. 5271) is a notable example. In general the codex was standard and the Coptic script of this period is usually simple and unaffected, imitating contemporary Greek hands and practices, for instance in the use of contractions for nomina sacra and of a supralinear stroke at the end of a line to denote the letter nu. The page is rarely adorned. Coptic calligraphy, however, shows at its best on the vealum codices which rapidly came into general use from the fourth century. The smooth pumiced surface of the skin was prepared for writing by ruled guide lines scored across the page from which the letters were hung with neat regularity. The characters were clearly and clearly defined in black ink with a split reed pen which allowed contrast between the thick vertical and thin horizontal strokes. There was no undue exaggeration of forms, no exuberant flourishes. The two hands of the Gnostic Pistis Sophia (Add. 5114) and the contemporary hand of the Achamnic biblical fragment (Or. 5299 i) are excellent examples of the fine penmanship and attractive layout of the early vealum codices of the fourth and fifth centuries a.d.

For literary works uncialls were invariably employed. The semi- cursive ligatured hand of the Apocalypse of Elias which was chosen to fill some blank leaves at the end of an early fourth-century codex of Deuteronomy, Jonah and Acts (Or. 7594) is exceptional. In the fine Sahidic manuscripts of the ninth and tenth centuries a sloping uncial was used for the scribal colophon (Or. 6784); similar half unialls could be used for legal texts (Or. 9173 i, which is of interest for the individual signatures of the accepting parties to the agreement).

The characteristic development of the Coptic literary hand is an enlargement of the size of the individual letters and of the format of the page, and an exaggeration of certain letters, notably the Greek phi and the special Coptic characters, quite out of proportion to the rest of the alphabet. After the introduction of paper in the thirteenth century there was a tendency to greater ornamentation of the letters and of the page. The fine codex of the four gospels in Bohairic, written in the second half of the seventeenth century, admirably illustrates these characteristics (Or. 1316).

The Coptic alphabet was borrowed by the Nubian church for the writing of liturgical books in the vernacular. Not all the Coptic letters
occur except in loan-words and it was necessary to add a few symbols to represent sounds peculiar to Nubian. The few Nubian texts which have survived date from the ninth to the eleventh centuries and the script exhibits a pronounced inclination to the right. The example exhibited here (Or. 6821) comes from the monastic library of St Michael's near Eissa in Upper Egypt and is perhaps the most complete Old Nubian codex to have survived.

2. ARMENIAN AND GEORGIAN

(Cases 12)

Between the years A.D. 350 and 400, St Mesrob, in collaboration with the Catholics, St Sahak, and a Greek named Rufanos, created a system of writing for Armenian. It consists of thirty-eight letters and was derived from the Greek alphabet. Some letters, however, were adapted from the Aramaic, or perhaps from the Pahlavi script, to express sounds which were peculiar to Armenian. The characters bear only a very slight resemblance to the Greek, but the influence of the latter is to be seen in the existence of vowels and capitals.

In Armenian manuscripts three varieties of hand were used—the Erkat'aj'ir (uncial), the Bolorgir (round hand) and the Nitrigir (notary's hand). Or. 81, a biblical manuscript which contains the Gospels, is a good example of an Erkat'aj'ir hand, written about A.D. 1181, while the Bolorgir is represented by a copy of the Epistles, dating from the thirteenth century (Add. 19730). Manuscripts in the Nitrigir hand are mainly from the last two centuries. The example on exhibition (Or. 1419) is a geographical and historical miscellany, copied in A.D. 1616.

The connection between the Georgian and Armenian alphabets remains obscure, although tradition ascribes the Georgian writing to St Mesrob. Two alphabets are found in Georgian. The Mchedruli (bey hand), of thirty-three letters, is the type of writing used in the Georgian SSR at the present day. The Mchua, a monthly journal of the Georgian Socialist Revolutionary Party, dated 1889–91, shows a Mchedruli hand (Or. 1311). The old Khuturi or ecclesiastical script (thirty-eight letters) is illustrated in this exhibition by a book of prayers, dated A.D. 1621 (Sloane 1438). It differs from the Mchedruli in possessing capital letters.

The alphabet of the Caucasian Albanians (Almaink) was a close relation of the Armenian. No original manuscripts in this character have survived but a table giving the letters of the alphabet was discovered in an Armenian manuscript of the fifteenth century; and some further examples have appeared in a copy made from this manuscript between 1580 and 1621 which is now in the Kurdian Collection.

IV. THE INDIAN SCRIPTS

1. NORTH INDIAN

(Cases 24–6)

Writing existed in India as long ago as the time of the Indus Valley Civilisation (2500–1100 B.C.). The script then was a form of picture writing which remains undeciphered to the present day. With the disappearance of this civilisation all knowledge of writing probably vanished for many centuries. Its reappearance occurs in the Maurya period of Indian history (third century B.C.) when a series of royal inscriptions, the edicts of Asoka, present us with two entirely new scripts. One, generally known as Brähmi and written from left to right, is the ancestor of all modern Indian scripts and of many others; the second, Kharṣṭṭhy, written from right to left, had a much shorter life, confined to North-west India and Central Asia, before disappearing without any descendants. Despite attempts to link Brähmi with the Indus script, the more plausible and majority view assumes that a Semitic alphabet—precisely which is uncertain—was imported into India to become the Brähmi we first meet in the inscriptions. This must have happened some time before the third century B.C. to allow for the remarkable adaptation of the alphabet to Indian needs.

Brähmi is, in the strictest sense of the word, not an alphabet, since each basic consonant must automatically be read as consonant + a. This syllabic device can be explained by the fact that a was by far the most frequent sound in the early North Indian languages called Indo-Aryan (of which Sanskrit is the best known). The much smaller number of vowels other than a were shown by attaching signs before, after, below or above the consonant to be modified. The languages of course required and the script possessed independent vowel signs or letters for the beginnings of words. Further, where two or more consonants were pronounced together the omission of a could be shown by placing one character above the other. The modern Indian scripts (if we exclude the foreign Perso-Arabic for Urdu and some languages of the North-west) still in the main use this system, even though the languages of the south belong to an entirely different family. Moreover, during the period of Indian cultural expansion into South-east and Central Asia during the first millennium A.D., scripts derived from Brähmi were carried by traders, colonists and monks and eventually adapted to
Tibeto-Burman, Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian languages, for which they are still used.

Early Brahmi was relatively homogeneous throughout India and, from the middle of the third century B.C., a continuous history of writing, unfortunately provisional in many respects, can be traced. For some centuries the forms of early Brahmi developed slowly in the increasing number of inscriptions, seals and coins on which they occur. No manuscripts survive from the earliest period and only a small number are older than the present millennium. These, on palm-leaf and birch-bark chiefly, come from regions climatically favourable to their preservation, such as Kashmir and Nepal, the dry desert sites in Chinese Turkestan and even Japan.

In the period of political unity in India that occurred under the Gupta dynasty in the fourth century A.D., considerable development in the scripts becomes apparent. The Northern scripts of the present day can all be referred to forms that grew out of types to which the name Gupta may conveniently be given.

Moreover, the export of manuscripts to the Buddhist centres of Chinese Turkestan resulted in the establishment of Gupta writing in Central Asia. Discoveries of manuscripts in the area reveal that varieties of this script were developed there to serve not only Sanskrit (Or. 118798) but also Iranian and Tocharian dialects. Descendants of Gupta writing continued to be used in Central Asia until the tenth century. Another Indian export into that region was Kharoshthi (N. xv. 350), the one Indian script not directly derived from Brahmi. As we have seen, its first appearance was contemporary with Brahmi. Its origin, however, was no doubt an Aramaic script introduced under Persian rule in the North-west, where Brahmi must have influenced its adaptation to Indian needs. Kharoshthi never spread far into India from its home in the North-west and eventually it died out both there (fifth century) and in Central Asia (seventh century).

The inscriptions of the Gupta period in India itself owe their diversity in part to innovation and in part to the influence of local and older traditions. It is difficult to assign hard and fast limits to regional styles of writing and overlapping constantly took place. From the end of the sixth century the immediate predecessors of the modern scripts begin to emerge. A script that flourished throughout North India from this time until about the tenth century, and even longer in the Far East, is variously called Kufti, 'acute-angled' or Siddhamātraka. In China and Japan it was called Siddham (Or. 8212 (195)). One feature of this script is a pronounced wedge seen at the tops of the letters. This head-mark, which is not new to Kufta, is one of the many devices observable in the
Japanese, Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian languages, for
are still used.

Brahmi was relatively homogeneous throughout India and,
iddle of the third century B.C., a continuous history of
unfortunately provisional in many respects, can be traced. For
les the forms of early Brahmi developed slowly in the
umber of inscriptions, seals and coins on which they occur.
ipits survive from the earliest period and only a small
older than the present millennium. These, on palm-leaf and
chiefly, come from regions climatically favourable to their
, such as Kashmir and Nepal, the dry desert sites in Chinese
and even Japan.

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THE ORIGIN OF THE INDIAN SCRIPTS
history of Indian writing to attain a general regularity in the shape of the letters and in the appearance of the inscription or page. In this tendency Kūṭila prepares us for the rise of Nāgarī from about the seventh century onwards.

In this script the head-mark, instead of being a wedge, becomes a straight line over the entire width of the letter. The effect of this lengthening is to make the writing appear to hang from a continuous line. Another feature of developed Nāgarī is the presence of a straight vertical stroke to the right of the letter, joined to the horizontal top-line at right angles. These two features occur in a good many of the letters, though not in all; and they are also apparent in other scripts. Nāgarī, originally a western script, has gradually come to displace regional alphabets for the use of Sanskrit, especially in the last two centuries. But in Central and Western India various forms of it have been widely used in inscriptions and literary documents over the last thousand years. Today Hindi and many of its neighbours (Marāṭhī, Bihārī and Nepāli for instance) use its latest stage under the name of Devanāgarī (Add. 11414).

In the North-west Kashmiri still uses a script that goes back directly to a western form of Gupta writing. With antecedents in the manuscript finds at Gilgit (seventh century), the Sāradā of Kashmir (Or. 6758) is found from the ninth century onwards and has changed little up to the present time. The North-west possesses a number of other, related, scripts. For Sindhi and Panjabi dialects numerous varieties of the Langā script are used. Tradition has it that Langā was adapted in the sixteenth century to write the sacred hymns of the Sikhs. This adaptation is called Gurmukhī and is now also used for secular Panjabi (Or. 12093). Another popular cursive script of the area is Ṭākerī, employed for the mixed dialects northward of the Panjāb and for which a polished form called Dehāri also exists. The use of Nāgarī in Kashmir is recent and may be recognised by the extremely thick strokes of the letters.

In the North-east of India the present scripts (Bengali, Assamese, Māithili and Oriya) may all be referred to developments of the proto-Bengali (lately termed Gaudī or Gaundī). In origin this group derives from an eastern variety of the Kūṭila type which appears in the seventh century but subsequently undergoes considerable Nāgarī influence. A special position is occupied by Nepal. The northward retreat of Buddhism into the highlands, where the Mahommedan invasions did not penetrate, is marked by a quantity of manuscript remains and the scripts found in them may briefly be mentioned here.

While the oldest manuscripts preserved in Nepal are in Kūṭila, the
appearance of the thick, flat-topped script (Or. 6902), deriving from the Buddhist centres of the Pala kingdom of Bengal and Bihar, dates from the tenth century, a period when Nāgarī was prevalent in Eastern India. This script, sometimes called Ancient Northern Character, was maintained in Nepal in ornamental forms for some centuries and one of its variants (Nākā) is also found in Tibet. Another script used in Nepal during the Middle Ages is a hooked type (Vartala or Bhanjina Matha) which recalls the Oria character and certainly has Bengali affinities. By the seventeenth century the prevailing script was a flat-topped one called Nāgari or Nepāli character. The Gurkha conquest in the eighteenth century resulted in a spreading use of Nāgari and the current Indian type is now the official script of the Nepalese kingdom. The Nepalese scripts were also employed for a Tibeto-Burman language of the area, the Newari; this now also uses the Indian Devanāgarī.

The presence of Nāgari in Eastern India for a time obscured the development of the Bengali script. A proto-Bengali script is, however, found in the tenth and eleventh centuries. From this time the development of Bengali writing continues until it becomes fixed in the seventeenth century (Or. 1191). Modern Bengali to some extent shares the Nāgari characteristics of a flat top-line and a straight right vertical. Their distribution, however, varies in the two scripts. The script of Mīthila, a neighbouring territory to the west, where a dialect of Bihār (Maithilī) is spoken, is closely related. It is now used only by the local Brahmans. The Assamese language, spoken to the east of Bengal, is written in a script almost identical with the Bengali, but Manipuri, a Tibeto-Burman language of the North-east, uses a startlingly different form (Or. 7565).

The script of Oria (Oriya) is held to derive from an early form of Bengali, although the influence of Nāgari also went into its formation. At the present time two forms of this script are found: the Brahmā, which was used for manuscripts and became the basis of the printed character (1412.4.11), and the Kāraṇī, a cursive variant. The Oriya script (Brahmā) is easily recognized by the marked curvature of the letter-tops, which sometimes dwarfs the significant element of the character. The present form of the Oriya script starts in the fifteenth century and is thought to have been influenced by the neighbouring Telugu writing.

 Tradition places the beginning of the Tibetan script in A.D. 652. According to this tradition the script was adapted from an Indian original. No doubt this original was a contemporary form of northern writing, related to the Kālī. As Tibetan belongs to a group of languages entirely unlike the Indian and possesses some quite different sounds, the original script had to be adapted to its special needs. The present form of printed Tibetan is strikingly similar to the earliest examples of the script. Two main types are distinguished: the one, used in block printing as well as modern fonts, has a head-mark somewhat like the Nāgārī and is called ‘head-possessing’; the other, a cursive form, omits the head-mark and is called ‘headless’. This cursive type has some three or four varieties.

In the west of India a script related to Devanāgarī, but retaining various archaic features, is associated with the Jains (Or. 5149). An ancient religious community with a strong literary tradition in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Gujarati, they have preserved manuscripts almost as old as the Nepalese. The conservative styles of Jain manuscripts—striking also for their tradition of illumination—were maintained until modern times. In the Deccan, another form of Nāgārī, called Nandi-nāgārī, has been used for over a thousand years.

The normal script used for Marāṭhi is a Devanāgarī, called Bālābodhi, which scarcely differs from the type based on the manuscript traditions of Benares in the east. There also exists a cursive hand called Moḍī (Or. 6391), in which the use of the horizontal top-line has, if anything, been extended. This script has also been used in lithographed texts. Its original was supposed to be an adaptation of Devanāgarī, which took place in the late seventeenth century, to achieve greater speed in writing. This view must now be revised since older manuscripts in Moḍī are known.

Another cursive script, called Kaithī and no doubt of the same origin as Devanāgarī, is found in use throughout Northern India from Bihar in the east to Gujarāt in the west. In Gujarāt a form of this script displaced Nāgārī in the nineteenth century as the literary and printed character for the Gujarāti language (14145.4.1). In Bihar another form has also been printed for the local speech (14121.4a.4). Kaithī is found in manuscripts of Hindi literary texts, but is predominantly a clerical script used for practical ends. A characteristic of this script is the absence of the horizontal top-line; nevertheless we find that Kaithī is often written beneath a continuous line drawn right across the page.

2. SOUTH INDIAN (Casts 20–21)

South India is particularly rich in palaeographical material. Cave and temple walls, pillars, seals, coins and royal grants inscribed on imperishable metal plates tell the illustrious story of her ancient dynasties. Yet when it comes to tracing the historical development of the scripts now
used in this particular part of the peninsula the picture is often made more obscure by the very wealth of material. There is evidence that the prototypes of the modern scripts developed around A.D. 350 and that they in turn can be traced back to a southern type of the Asokan Brahmi which in itself was probably only a regional variation of the inscriptions drawn up by the imperial secretariat at Pataliputra.

After the fourth century the southern scripts split up into a number of different groups, some of them almost identical, some already showing considerable individuality. Some were short-lived blind alleys in a long and intricate process of evolution, but all of them showed marked signs of their northern ancestry.

There was the so-called Western Variety used in the Konkan, in parts of Gujar, Maharashtra and Hyderabad which, in the ninth century, was suddenly replaced by the introduction of the Nagari alphabet. The Central Indian script in the north of Hyderabad, the Central Provinces and to the south of Bombay, had a similar spin of life; at first closely related to the above-mentioned script it developed later into the so-called 'box-headed script', an attractive and highly individualistic form of writing. Between the seventh and the twelfth century the Later Kaliya inscriptions on the north-east coast of the present Andhra Pradesh already mirror the awakening of a new literary spirit in the Dravidian country. Somewhere during this period a turning point seems to have been reached and, though this script was at the beginning strongly intermixed with northern letters, as time went by it began to borrow more and more from the Grantha, Telugu and Kannada scripts.

From many points of view the Telugu-Kannada script—almost identical at present—is the most important of all South Indian scripts. After a rather tentative start at the outset of the first Christian millennium it made a more definite appearance in the inscriptions of the Kadambas during the fifth century A.D. From then on it developed steadily through a variety of different stages (Ind. Chart. 11) to the script now used in Mysore and Andhra.

The modern scripts prevalent in the extreme south of the Indian subcontinent are all based, in one way or the other, on the Grantha script. In the ninth century it was replaced in Mysore and Coorg by Telugu-Kannada characters whereas the Pallava Grantha of TōcampoṆi—the neighbourhood of Madras—began to move slowly but steadily in the direction of the modern Grantha, Tamil and Malayalam scripts.

The development of the early stages of modern Grantha (Or. 11731) is still obscure. As its very name suggests, Grantha was, and still is, a literary script. It was employed in inscriptions, and was the script which learned Brahmins in South India used to write Sanskrit on palm leaves, a highly perishable medium, surviving examples of which cannot be dated prior to the sixteenth century. By the ninth century a simplified form of the old Grantha seems to have reached Kerala and the modern Malayalam script has its roots firmly in this.

A different situation arose in the south of the Tamil country, where there was a well-developed script, Vaṭṭaṟṟuttu or round letters (Ind. Chart. 4) used in most parts of the old Pandya kingdom. This was a script of great simplicity specially suited to the distinctive phonetic system of the Tamil language as laid down by its ancient grammarians. It possessed no signs for aspirates and spirants, no ሹ and only one sibilant which lies between the two different kinds of .only and .Monad, when doubled, becomes a distinct plosive, ĺ. Since voiced and unvoiced consonants are mutually convertible there was no need to express them by separate signs.

Up to the eighth century both scripts seem to have existed side by side (Ind. Chart. 24) but under the Cholas, in the eleventh century, this old script was gradually supplanted by a Brahmanical adaptation of the Tamil-Grantha to the basic rules governing Vaṭṭaṟṟuttu. This means that whereas the Malayalam and the Telugu-Kannada scripts are modelled on the full scale of the Sanskrit alphabet, written Tamil is still of an austere simplicity allowing, for example, only one and the same character to express sounds like ka, kha, ga and ga. When, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, a number of European missionaries began to devote themselves seriously to a study of the Tamil language they were, amongst other things, greatly hampered by the habit of native writers of making no division between words, lines and stanzas (Or. 11989). The Jesuit Father Beschi (Add. 26110) began to initiate a reform and invented the ‘pattu’,  the dot above the consonant to indicate the absence of the inherent short a. This was taken over by native writers and eventually their manuscripts became not only more legible for the students of modern Tamil but, by introducing a division between the stanzas, their verses came to be set out like poems in the western manner (Or. 2728).

By the fifteenth century Vaṭṭaṟṟuttu was practically extinct in the Tamil country. In Kerala, the ancient coastline of Malabar, it remained alive for two more centuries; then a modified form called Kūḷaṟṟuttu was employed by Hindu sovereigns to draw up their grants. The Māppilas, descendents of early Arab settlers living in the neighbourhood of Telicherry and the Islands off the coast, used this script until very recently when it was replaced by a modified Arabic alphabet.

It can thus be said that all modern South Indian scripts are based on a variation of the Brahmi script used in the south of the Asokan Empire.
during the third century B.C., with the addition of certain characters used to represent sounds not found in the general ‘Indian’ syllabary, such as the reflex lateral *ra*.

**Sinhalese**

The origin of the script and language of Ceylon must be separately sought outside the island. The Sinhalese language was brought by immigrants speaking the Indo-Aryan dialect of their homeland in India. The first appearance of writing on the island takes the form of *Brāhmī* inscriptions not much later than the earliest *Brāhmī* on the Indian mainland. Its subsequent history falls into two broad stages. The first, covering the period from the third century B.C. to the seventh A.D., is marked by developments in the Sinhalese language that led to the loss of certain letters. The second period, from the seventh century onwards, began by reversing this process. Buddhist influences from the north led to a wide adoption of Sanskrit and this required a fuller script than was available. The need was met by borrowing from the Pallava Grantha script of South India and in addition a number of existing letters were modified under the same influence. The remaining characters can show a direct line of descent from the earliest Sinhalese *Brāhmī*.

The rich cultural activity that marked the eleventh to thirteenth centuries in Ceylon ensured the development of the reformed alphabet. Sanskrit was sedulously cultivated and the impact of this language continues to the present day. The form of script in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries presents little difficulty to the modern reader of Sinhalese.

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**V. SCRIPTS OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

1. **MAINLAND SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

*(Case 25)*

At first sight the various systems of writing used in the countries we now know as Burma, Thailand (Siam), Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam look very different from one another. These scripts have much in common, however, and when we trace them back to their early forms in manuscripts and rock inscriptions we find that they were all derived from a common Indian source.

During the first millennium A.D. there was already a considerable traffic between the coasts of South India and both the mainland of South-east Asia and the Malay archipelago. Traders, colonists and military adventurers travelled along this route, bringing with them a cultural and spiritual tradition which slowly became assimilated and acclimatised on new soil. By the sixth century A.D. new kingdoms under Hindu rulers had arisen in several parts of South-east Asia, and Hindu colonists were spreading a knowledge of Sanskrit and a form of writing based on the early Grantha script of South India.

The other great cultural force at work in South-east Asia was the Buddhist religion, which may have been introduced from India before the time of Christ and which continued to spread throughout the first millennium A.D. Its impact was reinforced by the importation of Pali scriptures from Ceylon in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Together, the culture and civilisation of India and the Buddhist religion played an immense role in implanting a common cultural tradition among the peoples of South-east Asia.

The writing system imported from India which helped to diffuse this tradition gave rise to what was virtually a common South-east Asian script in about the sixth century A.D. It spread outwards from the Mekong and Menam basins and southwards into the Malay peninsula. From it, in the course of time, evolved the Mon, Burmese, Cambodian, Thai and Lao scripts, each of them adapting and adding to the script to make it capable of reproducing the sounds of the language concerned.

Manuscripts written in the scripts of South-east Asia take a variety of different forms. Many are written on palm-leaf, the traditional writing material of South and South-east Asia. The leaves are usually those of the talipot palm, *Corypha umbraculifera*, sometimes of the palmyra,
Borassus flabellifer, which is shorter and sometimes wider than the former. Burmese and Thai medical and astrological works, and horoscopes, are often written on palmry. The bundle of inscribed leaves is held together by cords through the centre and protected by carved wooden boards at top and bottom.

Besides palm-leaves, folding books (parabaik) of thick white or black paper were found throughout the area. Paper was probably introduced from China at an early date, and the typical South-east Asian paper manuscript consisting of one continuous sheet folded accordion-style is no doubt derived from the Chinese folding book of similar shape that was common from the Sung period onwards. Brightly painted folding books, more elongated than the Chinese prototype, occur in Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. Other folding books from Burma and Thailand consist of blackened paper written in white characters with a steatite pencil, a less laborious business than writing with a metal stylus on palm-leaf.

The major written languages of South-east Asia will now be considered separately, to see how the original South Indian scripts underwent different developments in various parts of the region.

**Mon (Talaing or Peguan)**

During the first millennium A.D., varieties of the South Indian script related to the early Grantha alphabet began to spread eastwards among the countries of South-east Asia. One variety adopted by the Khmer people developed into the modern scripts of Cambodia and Thailand. Another, taken over by the Mon people of South Burma, Martaban and Tenasserim, was used to write the Mon or Peguan language and later adapted for Burmese and other languages of that area. The earliest Mon inscriptions, however, are those found at Nakhorn Pathom in southern Thailand. We can no longer trace all the intermediate stages through which this script developed into the form of writing found in eleventh-century Burma, although the relationship is clear enough.

In appearance, the Mon script differs from that developed by the Khmers. Its letters are more rounded, composed of circles or segments of circles, and having a monumental appearance. In the course of time, as Mon began to be used more and more for writing inscriptions, this tendency to roundness became more pronounced and the forms of different letters became less easily distinguishable from one another. The Mon script closely follows the model of the Sanskrit alphabet and has found it necessary, like other languages of this area, to modify the system of notation for its own sounds to accord with the pattern of a foreign speech, adding certain marks and symbols to represent sounds not found in Sanskrit.

**Burmese**

The Mon peoples of Southern Burma were overrun in the eleventh century by the Burmese from Pagan, who proceeded to assimilate their culture and adopt their script. Mon and Burmese inscriptions of this period are written in characters which are practically identical and obviously derived from the same source. This Mon-Burmese culture, essentially Buddhist in character, was reinforced in the succeeding centuries by Pali Buddhism imported from Ceylon. In its early stages the Burmese script exhibits two main forms: a rounded script found on stone inscriptions, possibly derived from Pali writing, and a more angular cursive form seen on votive tablets and fresco inscriptions, possibly related to pen and pencil writing. A later development was the decorative 'square Pali' script found on Buddhist manuscripts used for votive purposes. An example of the latter, a Kanmanthari written in large glossy lacquered characters, is exhibited. It is a handsome script, but not easily legible. Kanmanthari manuscripts are of various types, all of them based on the palm-leaf in shape. Those from the north may be of lacquer on a silk core, or on brass if the donor was a poor man; those from the south may be written in gold letters on ivory (see Or. 3446) or, for poor donors, on lacquered palm-leaf.

From the lapiary script gradually developed the rounded characters which make up the Burmese written language of the present day, both hand-written and printed. In adapting the script to their own use, the Burmese added marks to indicate tonal differences. Like the Mon script from which it was derived, the characters of modern Burmese are made up almost entirely of circles, half-circles, and segments of circles in different combinations. It has been suggested that these characteristic shapes may be due to the naturally rounded form of letters traced with a stylus on palm-leaves.

**Cambodian**

Among the scripts of South-east Asia derived from an Indian alphabet, Cambodian or Khmer is one of the best documented from early times. It is found in its earliest form in inscriptions dating from the fifth to the ninth centuries, which bear a close resemblance to the ancient scripts of South India. From the ninth to fourteenth centuries the script began to take on individual Cambodian characteristics and during this time it was used as the vehicle of writing of the brilliant Khmer civilisation, which had its capital at Angkor. After the fourteenth century the Cambodian script developed along two distinct lines, one branch serving for the sacred texts of Buddhism, generally written in the Pali language, and...
the other, a more cursive form, used chiefly for secular works written in the native Cambodian language. The former is known as nul, the latter as chrina; examples of both are shown in this exhibition.

Because of the difference in structure between the indigenous language and the script used to write it, the Cambodians found it necessary to adopt certain phonetic conventions in representing the sounds of their own language, and to add many vowel signs and diacritical marks which were not needed for the notation of Sanskrit. In this way it was possible to introduce into the traditional alphabet new elements necessitated by the development of the Cambodian language, but without making any fundamental change in the system of writing, which remained basically Indian. Many Cambodian manuscripts are written in the Pali language but in Cambodian characters. The same script has been used to transcribe other languages such as Thai. (See the manuscript Add. 13347 exhibited in Case 23.)

THAI (Siamese)

The modern written language of Thailand grew out of the Cambodian or Khmer script and is therefore yet another of the numerous family of scripts descended from an Indian source. In its northern forms it was probably also influenced in some respects by the thirteenth century Mon script of Lamphun. (A virtually continuous gradation from Thai to Burmese forms of letters can be seen if one compares a series of scripts ranging from northern Thailand through the Shan states.) Written Thai employs the full range of consonants found in the Sanskrit alphabet, following the same alphabetical order, and is therefore capable of transcribing exactly the many words of Sanskrit origin which have found their way into the Thai language. It has also added consonants such as $f$ and $p$, the latter to replace the Indian $j$ which had come in via Cambodian as $b$.

The forms of the letters have diverged considerably from their Cambodian prototypes. There are indications that the modification of Cambodian script which produced the modern Thai system of writing was in fact deliberate and planned, and not the result of gradual evolutionary development over a long period. One major innovation was the introduction of accents clearly indicating the tone in which a syllable was to be pronounced. Thai is written in horizontal lines from left to right, like all scripts of Indian origin.

LAO

The Lao people form a large and important group within the Tai race. As might be expected, the Laotian and Thai scripts are closely related. In comparison with Thai, however, the Laotian writing system is simpler and more nearly phonetic in its representation of the spoken language. But the popular language of Laos which employs this script is still in a state of considerable flux, and there is a tendency on the part of conservative scholars to favour an orthography which in part reflects the historic forms of words rather than their present-day sounds. For the most part, Lao manuscripts are written on palm-leaves, the letters being incised with a metal stylus on both sides of the leaf.

VIETNAMESE

The principal language of modern Vietnam is a tone language, basically monosyllabic in structure, which has been subject for the past two millennia to cultural influence from China. Consequently the earliest writing system used in ancient Annam, as also in Japan and Korea, was Chinese, which continued to be the language of learning and culture until comparatively modern times. For native literature of a more popular kind, a new system of writing known as chu-nom was developed. Basically, this was a method by which Chinese characters, or modifications and combinations of Chinese characters, could be used to represent the spoken language of Annam. This language was at the same time enriched by the introduction of many words of Chinese origin into its vocabulary. The writing of the chu-nom script, however, was governed by no fixed rules or well-defined principles. Only the context could decide whether a Chinese character was to be read phonetically or ideographically, or which part of a synthetic character should determine the sound and which the meaning. This made the chu-nom script exceedingly difficult to read and write, and it has now been supplanted by a more nearly phonetic script in roman letters, augmented by diacritical marks to indicate tones and to provide additional vowel symbols. The roman script is now universally used in Vietnam.
2. ISLAND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

From the beginning of the Christian era this area was associated with India through trade, and in Java especially the influence of Hinduism can be seen from an early period. Sanskrit inscriptions in Java go back to the fifth century A.D., but the oldest dated inscription is that of Changgal, A.D. 752. The script differs only slightly from the South Indian Pallava Grantha alphabet and shows similarities with the Cambodian script of the time.

From the ninth century on, the Kawi script, showing a clear relationship to the script of the Changgal inscription, was in use and developed into the modern Javanese script (Elgerton 761; Add. 12501), which has now been supplanted by the Roman alphabet.

According to tradition the Javanese script was introduced by the legendary king Haji Saka. It is used for the Javanese, Balinese (Or. 12971 (1)), Sundanese and Madurese languages, the Balinese script only differing from the Javanese in having a rounder form. It is a syllabary consisting of twenty $a$-bearing consonants with various signs to represent vowels other than $a$, and is written from left to right.

The Batak script of North Sumatra is not a native invention but apparently derives from a simplified Indian script. It consists of nineteen letters written from left to right on bark (Add. 19381) or from top to bottom on bamboo. Closely related to the Batak script is that of the South Sumatra Redjang-Lampung group of languages. It is called ‘Karung’. The Redjang syllabary has twenty-three characters, whilst the Lampung has nineteen. Both are of South Indian origin and are written from left to right.

In South-west Celebes another alphabet of Indian origin developed, the script of the Buginese and Macassarese languages. The Buginese alphabet of twenty-three letters (see Add. 12147), and the Macassarese alphabet of nineteen letters bear a close relationship to each other, the Buginese having four additional letters to indicate a preceding nasal consonant. However, the derivation of this script is not clear. All the letters are pronounced with an $a$ and the order of the alphabet is almost that of a Sanskrit one, suggesting an Indian origin, but there is no obvious relationship to the Devanagari script, though such an ultimate derivation probably via South India is generally accepted.

Subsequent to the ancient Hindu influence on the Malaysian Archipelago, the influence of Islam came via Gujarat in North-west India during the fourteenth century. The important route between the west and the Archipelago was through the straits of Malacca and so it was North Sumatra and the Malayan Peninsula which were the first to establish contact with Moslem merchants not only from India but also from Arabia. They brought with them the Arabic script which thus made its entrance to the whole area of the Archipelago and in which the Malay language came to be written. Like Javanese, Malay is now usually written in the Roman alphabet.

3. INVENTED SCRIPTS OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA

LOLO AND MOSO

Two invented scripts used by non-Chinese peoples of China are Lolo and Moso (also known as Na-lih). Both languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman group and are spoken in Yunnan, Szechwan and other parts of South-west China, as well as in northern Vietnam and the valley of the Mekong. The scripts they employ are of unusual interest, having no apparent affinities with other written languages, not indeed with each other.

It has been affirmed that Lolo originated as an ideographic script, but it is now agreed to be phonetic and syllabic. Over a thousand distinct character are identified, though not all of them are common to the whole region; there are wide regional differences in both the spoken and written language. Lolo may be written either horizontally or vertically, the letters being tilted at an angle of 90° in the latter case. It is believed that the horizontal form of writing is the older of the two. The vertical script is found chiefly in those areas which have always been subject to Chinese domination whilst the horizontal script is confined to areas in which the Lolo have maintained their independence. Little is known of the early development of written Lolo, though bilingual Lolo/Chinese inscriptions dated as early as 1535-4 have been found.

The origins of the Moso script are also obscure, though it appears to be an invention of no great antiquity. It is one of the few surviving examples of a pictographic script, based on recognizable drawings of animals, birds, humans and everyday objects. The great majority of Moso manuscripts written in this script consist of magical texts, incantations and invocations to the gods, often meant to be chanted aloud by members of a priestly caste.

Examples of Lolo and Moso manuscripts are to be seen in Case 23 (Or. 5562 and Or. 11417A-11426A).
VI. THE CHINESE SYSTEM OF WRITING

1. WRITING AND LANGUAGE

(Case 16–18)

Chinese writing began with simple pictures. As in other pictographic scripts, the various objects of everyday life form only part of the language, being mainly nouns. For verbs, two signs can combine to denote action, and in Chinese the sign for ‘hand’ was very common. Abstract ideas like ‘above’ and ‘below’ were represented by a short line above or below a longer line. For the sounds which these represented, compare basic English, or the nineteenth-century ‘Pidgin’, where each syllable has an element of meaning. Even in ancient times, the language had one strong vowel for each unit of meaning. Each picture, or ideogram, thus represented one unit of meaning, and was pronounced in one syllable. The next step was phonetic borrowing, a reasonable transition, as related words were similar in sound, and the principle of using the ‘hand’, ‘tree’, ‘water’ and other symbols in combination was already established. It is very often the left-hand element that stands for the idea suggested. Actions will have ‘hand’ at the left, emotions will have ‘heart’, trees will have ‘tree’, while on the right is a phonetic used for its similar sound.

These composite characters, determinative plus phonetic, soon became the most common type. The ‘tree’, ‘hand’, and ‘water’ are still easily recognisable, but because many of the old ‘phonetics’ were approximate, each character is learnt fresh, without too much reliance on the phonetic as a clue. In this way, the modern Chinese script has become a vehicle for thought divorced from pictures.

A characteristic of ideographic scripts is the lack of attention paid to variants in pronunciation, in place or in time. European scholars, particularly Bernhard Karlgren, have made valuable contributions towards the reconstruction of the ancient pronunciation. (See Grammata Serica Recensa in Case 18.) Medieval pronunciation is reflected in the codification of poetical rhymes, still obligatory in traditional poetry, though the modern sounds may not be phonetic rhymes.

From 1900 this dissociation of written and spoken language was challenged. Peking speech forms entered the written language, and as the number of two-syllabled words increased, the number of common characters was drastically reduced. The dialect printing houses established by European missionaries in the nineteenth century had Roman and pinyin founts for many regional variants (see Bible stories in Shanghai dialect, Case 16), but today all publishing is in the literary standard based on the speech of Peking. Chinese is fairly homogeneous in the north and west, but in the south-east there are widely different spoken languages. All have the same published literature.

To reinforce the authority of the Peking pronunciation, a Roman alphabet is now taught to schoolchildren. Parallel with this, the elimination of complex characters is achieved by using simpler semi-cursive forms in all publications. This process is continuing, a remarkable demonstration of the flexibity of an ancient script.

2. FORMS OF THE CHINESE SCRIPT

Divination inscriptions on bone of about 1500 B.C. are some of the earliest-known examples of Chinese script. Perishable materials for writing during the next thousand years were bamboo, thin strips of wood, and silk. For epigraphical evidence there are many bronze ritual vessels, with a formal, and sometimes ornamental, script. From 100 B.C. onwards extant inscriptions on wood and silk attest a highly developed script, both standard and cursive, which has served Chinese culture and government almost unchanged for two thousand years. This early period is represented in the exhibition by two oracle bones, early bronzes, a lacquer wine-cup from Korea, and garrison documents from the Great Wall of China. The ‘clerical’ hand has been the official standard from the Christian era, modified by the use of a long-haired brush and by the example of great calligraphers.

Palaeographic development after the establishment of the standard S—shu can best be seen in a series of Buddhist manuscripts of the fourth to tenth centuries. This is a formalised monastic hand, acquired over centuries by schools of scribes. In this limited field, dating by calligraphy is alone possible. For instance, the broadened final stroke clearly derives from the stiff style of the Han dynasty, probably due to the concentration of writing on thin slivers of wood. This formal style eventually became the standard for block-printing, and later for metal type founts.

Cursive writing exists in all possible varieties. Whereas in European schools the manuscript hand is standardised, the Chinese running hand can merge into ‘grass script’, a cursive hand in which the models are taken from great calligraphers.

Calligraphy came to be equated with education. As an art form it is integrated with painting and block-printing. Through the technique of
ink-squeezes of stone inscriptions, the style of famous inscriptions has been copied down through the centuries. A ‘rubbing’ of a Tang dynasty inscription found in the T’un-huang caves is shown here. Calligraphy is still a real aesthetic element in the education of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. Reproductions from recently published books have been chosen to show the continuity of tradition.

3. KOREAN AND TANGUT

(Case 13)

Apart from the standard forms of Chinese, there are the deliberate archaisms of seal-script and the even more fanciful adumbrations used in magic charms and talismans. A whole system of fortune-telling depends on the cabalistic analysis of strokes in the characters of a person’s name. Since this conscious use of writing could easily have been adapted to phonetic notation of Chinese or foreign languages, it is perhaps surprising that so few inventions have any vogue in East Asia. The powerful influence of Chinese culture, especially in the Tang dynasty, spread Chinese writing and ideas so widely and deeply that the neighbouring non-Chinese peoples rarely wrote their own languages. In Korea, a few songs survive from the early period, written in Chinese characters with conventional readings for grammatical endings. In Vietnam, the native words could be represented by composite characters, one part being the Chinese character for the meaning, and the other part being a Chinese character indicating the sound.

Over the centuries the received pronunciation of Chinese borrowings diverged in Japan, Korea, North China, South-east China, and Vietnam, so that Koreans, for instance, needed their own way of representing Chinese characters.

In 1446 King Sejong of Korea promulgated the first true phonetic alphabet, based on linguistic principles. Most previous East Asian scripts, including Sanskrit, were based on the syllable, but King Sejong clearly distinguishes consonants and vowels. The letter り is a downward hook, an ideographic representation of the obstruction of the glottis by the tongue. The letter ㅗ is an upward hook, representing the tip of the tongue touching the gums. The letter ㅗ is taken from the Chinese pictograph ‘mouth’. After relating the palatals, dentals, etc., to the five elements and the five musical notes, King Sejong proceeds to form other consonants by addition of strokes. The forms of his basic consonants already existed in music notation, but the vowel system is entirely new. Horizontal or vertical lines, with dots before or after, show vowel quality in a logical manner. (Hwannin ch’ôngum, fol. 5 b–6 a.)

This alphabet did not replace Chinese characters, but was used for pronunciation often alternately with Chinese characters. Each syllable was then written in a unit square, and the practice has continued to the present day. Later the Korean alphabetic syllables were used for the grammar words just as in Japanese, giving a mixed script. Some popular literature, such as the historical novels, was written entirely in Korean alphabetic syllable groups, and today in North Korea all literature is in the script. In South Korea the mixed script continues to be used, and in scientific and technical literature English loan words tend now to be printed in Roman script.

The addition of strokes by King Sejong as a means of creating new simple signs was the method used some five centuries previously for the adaptation of Chinese to the Mongol-type language of the Liao, or Kidan, in North-east China. Deliberate deformation of semi-cursive characters enabled a polysyllabic language to be written more or less phonetically. Lack of textual material has hampered the full decipherment of this language, though an important inscription was discovered as recently as 1936. After the Liao State, another independent State, that of the Tanguts, arose in North-west China, speaking a Tibeto-Burman language. Perhaps encouraged by the possibility of an unbreakable military code, the inventor of the Tangut script began from elementary shapes and strokes, and built up complex characters partly guided by meaning elements, partly by sound elements. A typical character was defined in the Tangut dictionaries as being derived from parts of other characters. The elements themselves are in some cases derived from Chinese through Kidan, but a complete account has yet to be given of word-formation. The Tungusic Jurad used a script like Kidan but their successors, the Manchus, adopted the Mongol script (see p. 16).

The Tangut, or Hsî-hsia script was written from A.D. 1036 to 1227, and developed its own cursive styles. The documents in this cursive writing have not yet been read. After the destruction of the Tangut state by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, the language and script were forgotten, and decipherment is in progress, aided by native dictionaries.

4. JAPANESE

(Case 14–15)

The Japanese had no means of writing their own language until they borrowed the ideographic Chinese script as a result of their contacts with China and Korea during the early centuries of the Christian era. Copies of the Confucian classics must have been brought into Japan by
travellers from Korea in the fourth and fifth centuries, but it was not until the year 551, according to the official records, that Buddhist scriptures and images were presented by the King of Paekche (part of present-day Korea) to the Emperor Kimmee of Japan. From then on the flow of literature increased greatly. By the last quarter of the sixth century Buddhism had won a firm foothold in Japan. With it came great numbers of Buddhist scriptures written in Chinese, which were copied assiduously in Japan. An entry in the Nihon shoki, Japan's first historical record, mentions that in the year 673 a group of scribes were assembled for the purpose of copying the entire Buddhist canon; and there still exists today a Buddhist manuscript copied in the year 686 (see facsimile on screen above Case 1). An even earlier date is claimed for a commentary on the Lotus Sutra believed to have been written by the scholarly prince Shōtoku Taishi in 614-15.

For Japan at this period, China represented the fountain-head of all knowledge. With no literature of their own the Japanese proceeded in thoroughgoing fashion to adopt the whole cultural heritage of China including the literature of Confucian and Buddhist learning. This meant also the adoption of the Chinese script, which was seen by the Japanese as an all-powerful vehicle for the dissemination of new knowledge. It was not possible, however, to apply it directly to the writing of Japa
nese, which is a fundamentally different language from Chinese. So although educated Japanese of the time learned Chinese, steeped themselves thoroughly in the Confucian classics, and themselves wrote works in this foreign idiom, the problem of how to represent the Japanese spoken language in written form remained. Chinese characters could convey ideas but they could not in themselves show the grammatical inflections and syntax of Japanese. A way had to be found of adapting and conventionalising this foreign script to make it capable of conveying the sounds of the native tongue.

This was done in two ways. Some Chinese characters were used for their meaning but pronounced as Japanese words, without regard to their Chinese pronunciation. Others were used phonetically (taking the sound borrowed along with the character) to represent the syllables of native Japanese words. This meant writing a Chinese character for each syllable, a principle already adopted in China for another language, Sanskrit, to enable Buddhist texts to be spelt out in Chinese.

The two methods outlined above were employed in the Kojiki, Japan's first literary work completed in the year 712, and in the great poetical anthology the Manyōshū, completed about 760 (see Case 15). The poems in the Manyōshū are written in Chinese characters used sometimes for their meaning but more commonly for their sound; in the latter case they are known as Man'yōgana. The next step in the development of a specifically Japanese script was the modification and simplification of these 'phonetic' characters to form a systematic syllabary (Kana) with fixed phonetic values. During the eighth-ninth centuries such two syllabaries were evolved. The Katakana is a square, formal type of script formed from isolated parts of Chinese characters; the Hiragana is a rounded, more flowing script derived from the cursive form of full Chinese characters. (See Case 15 for examples of both Kana scripts and texts illustrating them.)

The Japanese language could now theoretically be written entirely in these Kana syllables, and much poetry and prose literature of the Heian period (tenth-twelfth centuries) was in fact written in Kana throughout, or with a slight admixture of Chinese elements. (See the facsimile page from a twelfth-century manuscript of the Thirty-six Poets exhibited in Case 14.) But already Chinese characters had gained too firm a hold to be abandoned. However suitable Kana might be for writing native Japanese poetry, the developing literary language of Japan needed a richer vocabulary. Borrowing from Chinese continued therefore, side by side with the use of Kana, and by the end of the Heian period (end of twelfth century) a mixed Chinese/Japanese script known as Kana-majiri had been evolved. This has remained the normal medium of written Japanese to the present day. It consists of Chinese characters supplemented by Kana symbols, the latter supplying verbal and adjectival inflections, particles, and the minor grammatical elements. It is thus a combination of two systems, ideographic and phonetic; a mixture of ideas and sounds. Words of Chinese origin, most uninflected Japanese words, and the stems of inflected words are written in Chinese characters, to be read either in pure Japanese or in an approximation of the Chinese sound that was borrowed along with the written character many centuries ago. Often the correct reading can only be determined by the context. By any standards, the Japanese system of writing is a complicated one. In its combination of ideographic and syllabic elements, and in its multiplicity of possible readings, it is unusual among the world's languages. (Examples of the many ways of writing Kana-majiri can be seen in Case 14.)

Although, as we have seen, this mixed phonetic script existed as early as the Heian period and became the vehicle for writing classical literature such as the Tale of Genji, in pure Japanese, learned men in Japan from medieval times until the mid-nineteenth century continued to write serious historical, literary and philosophical works in an approximation of literary Chinese, much as the monks of medieval Europe wrote in a kind of debased Latin. For Japanese readers,
however, this was a foreign language which could be read only with difficulty and often only with the aid of special reading marks, some of which indicated the order in which the Chinese characters were to be understood, whilst others supplied the necessary verbal and adjectival endings to enable the words to be read as Japanese. (See the movable- 
type edition of Nihon shoki in Case 14, where the guides to reading can be seen alongside the Chinese characters.) It is small wonder that this artificial Sino-Japanese language could be understood by only a small minority of educated people and that many scholars in the Edo period (1600–1867) rejected it in favour of a more easily intelligible way of writing their own language (Kana-majiri).

Literacy had been virtually a monopoly of the upper classes and of the Buddhist clergy during the early development of Kana-majiri as a national script from the twelfth to sixteenth centuries. With the rise of a literate urban population, coupled with the spread of woodblock printing on a large scale in the early seventeenth century, native literature written in Kana-majiri began to come within easy reach of ordinary people, especially the teeming townsfolk of Edo, Osaka and Kyoto. The script was not finally standardised, however, until movable- 
type printing was reintroduced from the West in the mid-nineteenth century. From then on, the block-cutter was no longer free to follow an individual calligraphic style in cutting Chinese characters in cursive handwritten form, or Kana symbols in a wide range of permissible variants. (See examples of block-printed books and different styles of handwriting in Case 14.) Forced into the mould of metallic type, the square character reigned supreme and Kana symbols were reduced to standard forms.

Further developments have occurred in the twentieth century. Kana orthography has been reformed and simplified, Katakana has come into general use for spelling out words of foreign origin (though there is an increasing tendency in modern books, especially scientific writing, to print such words and names in Roman script instead), and unsuccessful attempts have been made to encourage the writing of Japanese entirely in Kana or in the Roman alphabet. (See the editions of Heike monogatari and Manyōshū in romanised Japanese in Case 14.) The forces of tradition, however, and the great mass of existing literature in Kana-majiri have proved too strong. Recognising that Chinese characters are an integral and permanent part of Japanese writing, the Japanese have since the war contented themselves with an attempt to simplify the situation by reducing the number of characters in common use. Since 1947 newspapers and magazines have been restricted to a vocabulary of less than two thousand characters, but scholarly books continue to use a great many more.
HEBREW

Case 3
Or. 2211
Or. 4450
Add. 14762
Haggadah, or Passover Service according to the Ashkenazi rite. Ashkenazi (German) square and masbait (rabbinic) writing of the 15th century.
Or. 2956
91. 5-18. 3
Toraḥ Scroll. 19th century.
Add. 15423

Case 4
Or. 8212 (166)
A document in Persian (written in the Hebrew character) found at Dandan-Ulyik, Khotan, in Chinese Turkestan. Persian masbait character, 8th century A.D.
Or. 5550
Letter, dated the 15th of Tammuz in the year 587 of the destruction of the Second Temple (A.D. 1055). Square with some masbait writing. From the Cairo Genizah.
Or. 5519

Add. 1868
Add. Ch. 71255
Add. 27720
Haggadah, or Passover Service according to the Sephardi rite. Sephardi square character of the 14th century.
1902, b, 1
Facsimile of a Hebrew manuscript from the Synagogue in K’ai-feng-fu. Published in Shanghai, 1851. Chinese hand. Square character.
Harl. 5504

Add. 15978
Harl. 5716
Harl. 5704
Harl. 5698
Add. 27071
Maḥazẓer. Festival Prayers for the New Year and the Day of Atonement, etc. Translated into Judeo-German. Ashkenazi cursive writing of the 15th–16th century.
Add. 27062
Case 9

SOGDIAN

Or. 8112 (95)
A letter sent by a merchant in China to Samarkand. A.D. 513.

Or. 8113 (81)
A fragment of a story about the Persian hero, Rustam. 8th century A.D.

Or. 8112 (86)
A letter in cursive Sogdian script. 8th–9th century A.D.

UIGHUR

Or. 8112 (104)
Sekik Yusuf. An apocryphal Buddhist sutra. 8th century A.D.

Or. 8112 (109)
A Buddhist religious work of tantric content. A.D. 1350.

Or. 8112 (179)
Khlusulux. The Manichaean Confession of Sins. 8th–9th century A.D.

Or. 8113
A miscellany of Eastern Turkish works written in the Uighur character copied at Yezd in A.H. 835/A.D. 1431.

Runic Turkish

Or. 8112 (95)
A return of receipts into the quartermaster’s store and their issue. Before A.D. 776.

Or. 8112 (79–79)
A collection of proverbs. 8th–9th century.

Or. 8112 (161)
A fortune-telling manual. 8th–9th century.

Mongol

Or. 6975
Pa-ite-pa script.
Add. 27568
A fragment of the Mongol version of the Kanjur. 18th century.

Or. 6790
Volume 41 of the official history of the Ch’ing (Manchu) Dynasty. 19th century.

Or. 6975
A collection of vocabularies arranged according to subject in Manchu, Chinese and Kalmyk. ca. A.D. 1750.

Case 7

Or. 15

Add. 21737
Koran fragments on vellum. Meccan script. 9th–10th century.

Or. 2165
Koran on vellum. Mu’ll script. 9th century.

Or. 1397
Koran fragments on vellum. Kufic script. 10th century.

Or. 1562
Koran fragments on vellum. Mazakh script. 9th–10th century.

Add. 11735
Koran on vellum. Bent Kufic script. 10th century.

Add. 11736
Koran sections on vellum. Bent Kufic. 10th–11th century.

Or. 1199
Koran fragment on vellum leaf. Bent Kufic. 10th–11th century.

Add. 7214
Koran. Bent Kufic. 10th–11th century.

Or. 12884
Koran. Bent Kufic. 11th century.

Or. 3126
Koran. Archaic anticipation of Nashki. 12th century.

Or. 6973

Add. 7214

Case 8

Or. 1270

Or. 12523
Koran on vellum. Maghribi script. 13th–14th century.
Or. 1405
Or. 1280
Add. 8263
Koran. Indian Thuluth script. 11th century.
Or. 748, 23
14565, bb. 200 pt. 1

Case 9

Or. 1009
Add. 24406
Or. 1408
Or. 945
Or. 12809
Or. 13898
Or. 1339
Or. 88

Case 10

Or. 6898

Or. 7943
Or. 6490
Or. 11398
Or. 11846
Or. 4174
Or. 4170
An anthology of Persian poetry, without title or author’s name. Nastaliq. 15th century.
Or. 6579
Or. 2902
Add. 2771

TURKISH

Case II

Add. 7951
Or. 4188
Haref. 1815
Or. 1097

54
A letter from the Raja Bendhabara Paduka of Birni to the ‘English
Captain’ at Jambi. Nasubi. 17th century.
Or. 9484
A proclamation by Sir Thomas Raffles. Dated September 12th, 1811.
Nasubi.

ETHIOPIAN AND SOUTH ARABIAN

B.M. 48480
Bronze plate with inscription in raised South Arabian characters.
Or. 490
Octateuch, 11th century.

SCRIPTS ADAPTED FROM THE GREEK ALPHABET

COPTIC AND NUBIAN

Or. 8721
A fragment of a papyrus of the Didache, 5th century.
Add. 5114
Pistis Sophia. A gnostic text. 4th–5th century.
Or. 5199, i
A biblical fragment. 4th–5th century.
Or. 7394
Or. 6984
Discourse on Mary Theotokos attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem. 9th–
10th century.
Or. 9254, i
A legal agreement with the signatures of witnesses. Late 7th century.
Or. 6105
A work on the miracles of St Menas and a treatise on the Nicene
Canons. 10th century.
Or. 1316
The four Gospels. Second half of the 17th century.

ARMENIAN AND GEORGIAN

Or. 81
Gospels. A.D. 1181.
Add. 19730
Epistles. 13th century.
Or. 5459
A miscellany of historical and geographical works. A.D. 1616.
Or. 5135
A.D. 1889–91.
Sloane 1338
NORTH INDIAN LANGUAGES

Case 26

Seal
Seal and an impression in the undeciphered script of the Indus Valley Civilisation. Before 1500 B.C.

Stone fragment
Portion of the Sixth Pillar Edict of Asoka. Probably from the Delhi Mirath pillar. 238 B.C.

Stone fragment
Inscribed side of a stone reliquary cist from Sanchi. Brāhmī of the 1st century B.C.

Intaglio
Carnelian intaglio of the Gupta period and an impression. Inscribed in the Gupta character. 4th century.

Clay plaque
Buddhist votive plaque from Nalanda with Kauśā (Śīlaśamāṭhī) legend. Between 9th and 11th centuries.

Or. 8212 (105)
Prajñā-pāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra in Sanskrit and Chinese transliteration from Central Asia (Tunhuang). Sanskrit text in early Śālivākṣaṃ. End of the first millennium A.D.

N. xv. 350
Document on leather. North-western Prakrit in the Khaṇḍaṭhi character from Central Asia (Niya). 5th century A.D.

Or. 8212 (1038, 1222)
Palm-leaf and birch-bark fragments of Sanskrit texts from Central Asia (Koyumul). Early Central Asian Gupta. 4th-5th centuries A.D.

Or. 9013 (57-8)
Sad-dharma-puṇḍarika-sūtra. Fragments in calligraphic Central Asian upright Gāpka. Second half of the 1st millennium A.D.

Or. 11798B, A-B
Sad-dharma-puṇḍarika-sūtra. Fragments from a manuscript found at Gilgit (Kashmir), Central Asian upright Gāpka. Second half of the 1st millennium A.D.

Ind. Ch. 49
Copper-plate grant in Sanskrit. Nāgari from Benares. A.D. 1124.

Ind. Ch. 45
Copper-plate grant in Sanskrit. Nānḍināgari from Chikka Bagewadi (Belgaum). A.D. 1249.

Or. 8212 (109)
Part of a Tibetan poem. Early Tibetan character with head-mark from Central Asia (Tunhuang). 8th-9th century.

Or. 5734
Folio from the first volume of the Tibetan Buddhist canon (Kangyur). Formal Tibetan character with head-mark. 18th century.

Or. 11376
bSlaṅ kha nu mtho las phreng ba. Tibetan verses. Cursive Tibetan ‘headless’ character. 18th century.

19999 f. 65

Case 25

14121. g. 75
The First Lesson in Oriya addressed to Candidates for Missionary Labour in Orissa. Cuttack, 1844. Pages 4-5, including a table of printed Oriya characters.

Or. 11089

Or. 7563
Manipuri manuscript written on thin plates of wood. 19th century(?).

Or. 5061
Manuscript on birch-bark written in an unidentified language (Tibeto-Burman?) non-Indo-Aryan probably from the Assam district. Variety of the Assamese character, perhaps of the 18th century.

Or. 12052
Hymns in Assamese to Rama and Krishnā, written on thin sheets of wood. Assamese character of the 18th century.

Or. 6902

Or. 2208

Or. 11382
Tārā-namaskāra-vināyaka. Sanskrit in the Ratnā character.

Case 24
Add. 15414
Pośhā-ṭantra. Sanskrit in Devanāgarī of the 17th–18th centuries.

Or. 5149

Or. 6846
Nīla-mata-purāṇa. Sanskrit in the Devanāgarī of Kashmir. 18th–19th centuries.

24556 d. 155

Or. 11978 a (44)
Saṁgha-rakṣitadādāra from the Dīnagadāra. Birch-bark folio from Gilgit (Kashmir) in a precursor of the Śāradā character. Sanskrit. 7th century.

Or. 65798
Tarka-bhāṣā by Kesava Miira. Śāradā on birch-bark. Sanskrit. Earlier than the 18th century.

Or. 12093
A Geography of the Panjāb in Panjabi. Gurmukhī of the 19th century.

Or. 71 b. 32
The Holy Bible...translated into the Moolani Language. Scarpore, 1819. Printed Multani character.

24555 e 1

24121 b b 4

Add. 26522
Śrīsvānta Bājitī. Gujarati in the Kaitkī character with continuous top-line. 19th century.

Or. 6391

Case 20
Or. 3597 (a)

Or. 3597 (b)

Add. 5509
A portion of the Mahā-bhārata in Bengali. Bengali character of the 18th century.

24221 1. 27

SINHALESE

Or. 11661
First sheet of a copper-plate manuscript of the Āḷavaśīpama-tūrṇa-dharma-dharmadāna. Sinhalese in the Sinhalese character. 17th or 18th century.

24163, b. 5

SOUTH INDIAN LANGUAGES

TAMIL

Add. 26120
A Tamil-Latin dictionary written in 1744 by the Jesuit missionary Constanze Gioseffo Eusebio Beschi (1680–1746).

Or. 27238
A 19th-century manuscript of Kambal's Rāmāyaṇa (Book 4: Kiṅkirta-kāṇḍa). The stanzas are separated and the absence of the inherent short ā is shown by a dot above the consonant.

Or. 11999
An 18th-century manuscript forming part of Villiputṭūrar's Mahā-bhārata. The individual words and stanzas are not separated and nothing indicates the absence of the short ā.

Sloane 3027
An explanation of the Gospels written at the beginning of the 18th century by a member of the Lutheran mission in Tranquebar.
A metrical vocabulary, at one time part of the collection of manuscripts at Tanjore Palace. 18th century.

Or. 2744
Nāṇīl. A work on classical grammar, with commentary. Dated 1800.

GRANTHA AND VAṬṬERUTTU

Or. 11731
A part of the Ṵirṣga-parāga. Sanskrit written in Grantha characters. 18th century.

Ind. Chart. 4
The Vēḻyikudi grant of a Pāṇḍya king. The Sanskrit part is written in Grantha, the Tamil part in Vaṭṭeruttu characters. 8th century A.D.

Ind. Chart. 28
Grant of a Pāllava king written in Sanskrit and Tamil. The script is a mixture of Grantha, Tamil and Vaṭṭeruttu characters. 8th century A.D.

Catt 21

MALAYALAM

Add. 7126

Add. 7123
Rāmānājan Eguttacchan’s Malayalam version of Adhyatma-Rāmāyana. Late 18th century.

Add. 7127
Agni-pravīṣam, a ballad on a story belonging to the Rāma legend. About 1800.

TELUGU

Or. 12028
A copper alloy plate recording acts of a Governing Body of the Five Classes of Craftsmen. Late medieval or early modern period.

Or. 5397
A 19th-century manuscript of Rāliga Nāṭha’s Rāmāyana (Bala- and Ayudhyak-āṇḍa).

Or. 3740
A copy of Nannaya-Bhāṭṭā’s Mahabbhratā. 18th century.

Shone 3763
A bond written in the year 1733.

KANNADA

Add. 5328
A letter of Ḫaidar ‘Alli addressed to the commandant of Palghat. 18th century.

Add. 14397
Copies of inscriptions taken from the Jain temples in Belgaum. 18th century.

Add. 14370
Pāṇḍavaśāstra, an episode from the Mahābhārata narrating the combat between Arjuna and Śiva. An 18th-century manuscript with covers made of sandalwood.

Ind. Chart. 11
Grant of the Raṭrakūṭa, Gövinda III. Written in Old-Kannada in the year A.D. 804.

Or. 4539
Astrological calculations written in Kannada and Telugu, with quotations from the Sanskrit. 18th century.

MAINLAND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

THAI

Or. 4830
A folding book on divination, arranged according to the yearly animal cycle, with predictions illustrated in colour according to the signs of the Zodiac. Written in several hands. Early 19th century.

Or. 11857
Annals of Ayuthia (Siam), compiled at Bangkok in the reign of King Rama I. Copied in an elegant hand in the early 19th century.

Add. 12261
Sung sin chui. A Siamese version of a classical narrative romance in verse, widely known among the Tai-speaking peoples. Written in an unsophisticated hand in late 18th century style.

THAI IN CAMBODIAN SCRIPT

Add. 15347
Pōra mālai. A preaching text originally derived from a Ceylonese Buddhist work, but locally developed as a popular story in the countries of mainland South-east Asia, especially Thailand and Laos. Mid-19th century.
CAMBODIAN

Add. 27712
The tale of Čaukthokhat, a Buddhist folk tale. Written in Lao script in the 19th century.

VIETNAMESE

Or. 8218

12011, v.1

LOLO

Or. 360a
A manuscript written on silk in the syllabic script of the Lolo (Yi) people of South-west China. 19th century.

MOSO

Or. 1147a-1146a
Magical invocations and prayers in the pictographic script of the Moso (Na-khi) people of South-west China. 19th century.

THAI

Add. 12210

CAMBODIAN

Add. 17553

Or. 1245

LAO

Or. 5270
A Lao version of Vessantara-jâtaka, with some Pali insertions. Palm-leaf. Probably 19th century.

Or. 2300a

BURMESE

Or. 3456
A memorial presented to Sir Arthur Phayre when Commissioner in Burma, by the citizens of Moulmein. Written in gold letters on ivory plates. Dated 1848.

5340a and b
Early Burmese inscription on gold plates. Pali Buddhist text in archaic characters. 5th or 6th century A.D.

Or. 6389
Kammarâtâ. A set of disciplinary formulas for the regulation of Buddhist monastic life. Written on gilded and lacquered palm-leaves in Burmese square characters. 18th century.

Or. 13936
Bhikkhuni-pâtimokkha. The code of discipline for the order of Buddhist nuns, extracted from the Vinaya. Pali in Burmese script. Palm-leaf.

MON

Or. 5843
A work on Buddhist relics preserved in various shrines. 19th century. Palm-leaf.

Or. 9239

ISLAND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Case 22

JAVANESE

Egerton 765
Letter from a native Prince, inscribed in Javanese characters on a thin sheet of gold. 18th-19th century.

Add. 12301

65

**BALINESE**

Or. 13977
Letter of introduction from the Danish merchant Mads Johanssen Lange to the ruler of Tabanan in Bali, requesting permission for the botanist John Henshall to travel through his territory plant-collecting. Written on palm-leaf in Malay in the Balinese script. Dated 1812.

**BATAK**

Add. 13247
A magical text written on leaves of bark in the Batak script of North Sumatra. The text treats of *permisiban*, a receptacle for magic ointment. 19th century.

**BUGINESSE**

Add. 22257
A Buginese inscription of the Malay work *Hikayat Hamzah*, from Celebes. 19th century.

**REDJANG**

Or. 12066
A Redjang manuscript from South Sumatra, inscribed on strips of bamboo. The language is Malay and the writing is a local Redjang script known as *Ku-go-ngo*. 19th century.

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**THE CHINESE SYSTEM OF WRITING**

**CHINESE**

Case 15

1947 7-12, 335
Bronze mirror decorated with figures of the gods Hsi Wang Mu and Tung Wang Kung, a tiger and a winged deer. Early 3rd century A.D. The inscription consists of twenty-six characters: ‘The Shang Fang made this mirror, truly of great workmanship. Above are immortals who know not old age.’

1955 10-26, 1, 3
Lacquer wine-cup from the Chinese settlement at Lo-lang, Korea. The inscription around the base, incised in the lacquer, names the craftsmen who made the cup and dates it to the 4th year of *Yuan-Shih* (A.D. 4).

1947 7-12, 334
Bronze mirror made in the Shang Fang. Inscribed in *li-shu*, with four rhyming couplets describing the ornament and ending: ‘may your life equal bronze and stone, like that of marquises and princes’. Late 1st century A.D.

1935 11-18, 271
Bronze mirror with benedictory inscription in squared character. 1st century A.D.

1957 11-19, 2
Bronze mirror with benedictory inscription in squared character and an astronomical design. 1st century A.D.

1955 12-15, 1
Bronze ritual halberd (ku) decorated with the characters *ta yę*, probably the name of a sacrifice. 12th-11th century B.C.

1947 7-12, 456
Bronze spearhead inlaid in gold with eight characters of ‘bird script’: ‘Chou (Shao?) King of Yüeh, may he himself (for ever?) use it.’ 4th century B.C.

1945 10-17, 195
Bronze mirror decorated with the ram from the Zodiac. Dated A.D. 121.

Or. 7904
Chinese oracle bones 1592 and 1554 (rejoined in one piece). ca. 1000 B.C.

Transcription of Chinese characters on oracle bones 1592 and 1554. 1935 11-18, 2
Bronze vessel, the *Hsing Hou Kow*. Late 11th century B.C.

15235, 9, 91/3

Or. 7964
Chinese oracle bone 1650. ca. 1000 B.C.

15034, 9, 9

Or. 8211/97
Inscribed wood slip: *chuan* style. Han period.

Or. 8211/4, 307, 374, 432
Inscribed wood slips: *li-shu* style. Han period.

Or. 8212/327 Or. 8211/758
Examples of style, based on *K'ai-shu*, not greatly different from modern handwriting. Han and Chin periods.
Cursive handwriting, grass style. Han and Chin periods.

Or. 8211/795, 874
Cursive handwriting, running style. Han and Chin periods.

Or. 8211/792
Cursive handwriting, grass style. Han and Chin periods.

S. 5791
Tang dynasty ink-rubbing, from a stone inscription based on the calligraphy of Ou-yang Hsü. Found at Tunhuang.

S. 4080 S. 2778 S. 2192 S. 1724
4th century; 6th century; 7th century; 8th century, continued in 10th. Series of documents from Tunhuang illustrating the development of the monastic hand, 4th-10th centuries A.D.

Case 17
S. 618 S. 3392 S. 5257 S. 4653
Series of documents from Tunhuang, showing a variety of cursive hands. 7th-10th centuries.

S. 6983
Chinese manuscript showing use of reed pen in the period of Tibetan occupation of Tunhuang.

P. 1
Block-printed document from Tunhuang containing Buddhist verses on the twenty-four examples of filial piety. Probably 9th century A.D.

Case 16
Or. 8625
A ‘study’ of the handwriting of Chao Meng-fu and Tung Chi-ch’ang, with appropriate seals. Early 19th century?

Or. 12694
Yung-lo Ts‘u-tien, chapter 6933. Part of a vast encyclopaedia, copied in 1467 from the original manuscript completed in 1408.

15032. b. 3
Handwriting of Hsü Kuan-ch’i, an associate of the early Jesuits in China. Late Ming dynasty.

15032. b. 4
Facsimile of a letter by Hu Shih, 1948. The lines indicate book titles or proper names.

15530. b. 43

S. 388
Simplified characters of the 9th century. List of popular abbreviations of characters, some of which have become standard in China in the 20th century.

15118. b. 32
Seng-king 13th lob. Phonetic script used for the Shanghai dialect, 19th century.

S.S. 79/38
Two issues of the periodical Jingji Kangeongsae (Economic Entomology), illustrating simplified characters and the use of the Roman alphabet as an auxiliary script. October 1964 and January 1965.

Case 13
Or. 2975
Okboran kalbong. A historical novel written in hangul, the Korean alphabet. Fine court hand of the 19th century.

16599. a. 4
Hannun chungban. King Sejong’s explanation of the Korean alphabet designed by him in 1446. Modern facsimile of a block-print.

TANGUT
Or. 12380/3114
Regular block-print style. 12th century.

Or. 12380/3299
A block-print based on standard careful script. 12th century.

Or. 12380/3232
Manuscript written in a cursive hand. 12th century.

Case 14
JAPANESE
Or. 74. c. 1
Yokoaka hyakuban. A collection of Nō plays printed with movable type at the Saga Press, under the direction of Hon’ami Kōetsu. ca. 1605–10.

Or. 61. e. 1
Yuraiwa daizen. A Kōwaka-mai story of the Muromachi period. Handwritten copy in three rolls, with coloured illustrations. 18th century.

16996. f. 4
Or. 13139

Benchō monogatari. A *Nara-ehon* (illustrated manuscript) dealing with the exploits of Minamoto Yoshitsune and his henchman Benchō. 17th century.

Or. 59, bb. 5

*Nihon sōshi: jindai wo maki*. Early history of Japan, written in Chinese, with guides to Japanese pronunciation added in manuscript beside the Chinese characters. Printed with movable type by command of the Emperor Go-Yōzei in 1599.

Or. 59, b. 38


Or. 59, ao. 1

Heike monogatari. Tales of the Heike Clan, printed in romanised Japanese at the Jesuit Mission Press at Amakusa in 1592–5. Followed by Aesop’s Fables and a collection of proverbs, the *Kinkushi*. This is the only surviving copy.

11591, c. 22


16074, b. 1


Case 15

16100, c. 6

*Man'yōshū*. Classical anthology of Japanese poetry, written in the 8th century in Chinese characters used partly for their sound and partly for their meaning. Printed with movable type in about 1610.

16047, b. 10

*Kojiki*. Ancient history of Japan, completed in the year 712. The first work of native Japanese literature. This copy was printed from wood-blocks in 1803. The pronunciation is indicated in *Kana* alongside the Chinese characters.

Or. 6576

*Iroha*. The Japanese *Kana* syllabary, following the traditional order of syllables. Both *Katakana* and *Hiragana* forms can be seen in this manuscript. 17th–18th century.

Or. 12415

A collection of poem-slips (*Tanzaku*) and other specimens of calligraphy attributed to eminent poets, Buddhist abbots and princes of the

Imperial House. Compiled in the early 15th century. These Japanese poems are written chiefly in *Hiragana*.

Or. 970

*Sanjūmon*. The Chinese ‘Thousand Character Classic’, written in square formal style by the calligrapher Temmin. 19th century.

16274, c. 4

*Gyōsha sanjūmon*. The same work, in the semi-cursive *Gyōsha* style. Printed from the handwriting of the modern calligrapher Ishibashi Saisui. 1937.

16274, c. 3

*Shōsha sanjūmon*. The same section of the same work, in the fully cursive *Shōsha* style. Printed from the handwriting of the modern calligrapher Ishibashi Saisui. 1937.

16277, d. 19 (Photographic print taken from)

*Konjōjō darani-kyō*. Facsimile of the earliest surviving manuscript written in Japan. A Buddhist sutra copied in the year 686.

Or. 1605

Buddhist Proclamation. A public notice in scroll form appealing for funds from the laity for repairing and rebuilding parts of the Tōji temple in Kyoto. Dated 15th year of Eishō, 1518.
2. A manuscript containing the Recognitions of Clement of Rome and other works. Syriac. A.D. 412. Add. 12150, f. 171r.

Or. 8122 (161), f. 38v–39r.

9th–10th century. Or. 1162, f. 23r.
6. A richly-illuminated copy of the Koran, Thuluth script. 14th century. Or. 1141, f. 1r-v.


15. Three of five letters of introduction from Madr Johannsen Lange to five princes of Bali. Indonesian (Balinese). A.D. 1812. Or. 12971 (1-5).

17. King Sejong's explanation of the Korean alphabet designed by him in A.D. 1446. Facsimile of a blockprint. 16199.s.4.
花に明けに月に眠るか