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Dr. S. M. Imamuddin obtained his Master's degree (1943) and Doctorate degrees from Calcutta University (1951) and Madrid University (1956). During this period he enjoyed a Calcutta University post graduate fellowship, a R. G. Casey (Governor of Bengal) research Fellowship and a Spanish government scholarship and taught graduate and post graduate students at Central Calcutta (Islamia) college, Calcutta University and Dacca University. He received offer of full Bright Visiting Professorship and is now enjoying British Council and University grants commission and along with his professorship of Dacca University. He did research on Moorish rule in Spain and Afghan rule in India and published fourteen text books and reference works four being on Muslim Spain alone and also work more than sixty research papers about half being on Muslim Spain in international journals like Al-Andalus, Islamic Culture (India), Islamic Studies (Islamabad), Hamdard Islamic (Karachi) JASP (B) (Dacca) and JPHS (Karachi.)

S. M. Imamuddin
Contents

Preface 3
Introduction 4

Section I 9
Arabic Writing
Calligraphy

Section II 11
Arabic Libraries

Chapter I 32
Umayyad Library
Abbassid Library
Bayt al-Hikmah
Nizamiyah
Mustansiriyah
Libraries Under The Buwayhids

Chapter II 38
Fatimid Library

Chapter III 42
Hispano
Collection of Books
The Royal Library of The Umayyads
Private Libraries in Cordova
Public Libraries
Muslim Women Scholars
The Cordova Book Market
Provincial Libraries
Seville and Badajoz
Northern Towns
Eastern Towns
Destruction of Arabic Manuscripts
Conclusion

11 Arabic Manuscripts in Modern Spanish Libraries
The Escorial Library
Libraries in Madrid
Libraries in Granada
Libraries in Barcelona
Libraries in Spanish Town

3 4 9 11 32 33 34 36 37 38 42 48 50 53 55 55 56 57 58 58 59 61 66 67 68 71 75 75 76
PREFACE

This short memoir belongs to the series of papers and small books written so far on the subjects by the present writer. Before going to Spain on Study Leave, in September 1953, he had started taking classes on Islamic calligraphy and Numismatics with the Final year M. A. Students in his own department at the University of Dacca and on his return, in June 1956, he was induced to teach the same subject as an honorary teacher in the Library Science department newly established under the chairmanship of his highly esteemed friend Mr. M. S. Khan, the then Librarian of the Dacca University. This gave the present author an opportunity to have a better idea of the subject under review here and accordingly he published two papers consecutively on Muslim Libraries in Spain in the Journal of Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi, 1959, which later appeared as Memoir under the title Hispano – Arab Libraries, Karachi, 1960. He also published another article on Paper Manufacture in Muslim Spain in the monthly Bulletin of Dacca University Library, Vol I. No. 8, August 1958, edited by the same librarian.


The present author will feel amply rewarded if this small work succeeds in creating an interest in the students and readers. For all drawbacks in the text he himself is responsible and will try to remove them in future if pointed out by some learned reviewers.

37a, Stamford Road, London N1,
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S. M. IMAMUDDIN

INTRODUCTION

Prophet Muhammad’s secretariat functioned in its elementary form during his lifetime. The official transactions were registered by al-Mughirah b. Shu‘ayb and Hasan b. Namir. Letters addressed to Kings and Chiefs were drafted by Zayd b. Thabit and sometimes by ‘Abd Allah b. Al-Arqam. Under the first caliph Abu Bakr, Hadrat ‘Ali was placed in charge of correspondence besides supervising the captives of war. Hadrat ‘Umar established a Diwan on his accession to the Khilafat to register the names of the recipients of pensions and to deal with correspondence as well as finance.

To handle the official letters, mandates, diplomas and other state papers there was a board of correspondence of chancery office called Diwan al-Rasalat under the Umayyads and Abbasids and Diwan al-Insha under the Fatimids. Provincial revenue registers were maintained in Pahlavi in Mesopotamia and Persia, in Greek and Syriac, in Syria and, in Greek and Copt, in Egypt. The Arabization work which has begun under the second Caliph ‘Umar al-Faruq, was completed under the Great Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik. At the suggestion of Salib ibn ‘Abd-ab-Rahman, a Persian Mawla of Sijistan, ‘Abd al-Malik ordered the keeping of records, accounts and correspondence relating to Government business in Arabic throughout the empire in and from 693 A.C., the year the first pure Arab gold dinars and silver dirhams were struck at Damascus with Islamic religious formulas. Even the papyrus produced in Egypt was stamped with the words, (‘Say, He alone is God’) in place of the former seal of the cross and Christian formula to the great annoyance of the Greeks when it was exported to their lands leading to the levy of duties on merchandise, the movement of which had been so long generally free between the ‘Arab and Byzantine territories, and the strict vigilance was kept on postal (barid) service called ‘the eyes and ears of the King’.

The Surahs (verses) of the Holy Qur’an were collected under the Chairmanship of Zayd b. Thabit during the Khilafat of Abu Bakr. These were re-edited under the third Caliph Hadrat ‘Uthman based on the original copy of the Qur’an lying with the Prophet’s wife
Hafsa.A followed by the compilation of the Prophet's saying (Hadith) of which, according to the Sunni point of view, there appeared six reliable editions like Bukhari, Tirmidhi, Muslim, Mishkat etc under the early Abbasids. The Second Abbasid Abu Ja'far al-Mansur established a bureau of translations attended by scholars, scientists and linguists to discuss academic problems and translate books into Arabic Greek, Pahlavi and Sanskrit and it was further developed under the name of Baytah-Hikmah by the Abbasid Caliphs, Harun and Ma'mun, in the line of the Chinese Academy of Learning called Han-Lin-Yaun of Ming Huang and later a parallel institution grew up in Egypt under the sixth Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim bi-Ilah with the name Daru'l Hikmah.

Despite the early administrative, economical and social problems the Muslims had to find time for the development of Arabic letters by introducing 'Irab system and simplifying the angular form of the Arabic letters and also of the language by writing books on grammar, rhetoric and prosody. The Arabs from the very beginning of Islam took keen interest in the philosophy, subject and method of education and tried to solve their basic problems mutually by discussing them and writing books on education system. Arabic pedagogical literature is very rich, but most of the books on it are still in manuscript forms and need attention of the scholars. For overall improvement of their knowledge the Muslims wrote books on history, especially ghazwah and Tabaqat forms, geography (routes and countries), astronomy, medicine, arboriculture, agriculture and other sciences. Madrasahs were founded with libraries attached to the mosques which worked besides the prayer halls as the center of Muslim education and learning throughout the Muslim countries, as for example the Cordova Mosque Madrasah was then the Oxford University of the Umayyads Spain and al-Azhar of the Fatimid is still functioning as one of the highest seats of learning in Egypt. Madrasah, as a separate and independent institution, however, grew up later under the Abbasids, among which Nizamiyyah and al-Mustas—ariyah of Baghdad topped the list. Under the Buwayhids the centre of learning shifted to Shiraz and under the petty dukas and some powerful Sultans, other centres of learning came up in other towns and regions.

All these Mosque Madrasahs and institutions had their libraries beside the Imperial Libraries of the Umayyads, Abbasids and Fatimids. The later Abbasid and Fatimid Caliphs of Iraq and Egypt and the Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Rahman III and al-Hakim II of Spain donated their personal collections to the central library growing rapidly in their capitals. Rare manuscripts were purchased at high prices or copied in foreign lands by travellers and Caliph's agents. Native scholars were patronized and foreign ones were invited to assist them in the translation works and in the production of original writings.

It is pathetic, however, to note here that while Muslim libraries and Arabic manuscripts sustained irreparable losses at the hands of the Christian rulers in Spain during and after the period of reconquesta, the Muslim libraries elsewhere suffered tremendously due to the jealousy of sects and schism and political rivalry of Kings and Chiefs.

During the time of the Prophet adim (leather) and 'Asib (palmleaf) were used for writing missionary letters. Pieces of camel's bones ('azam especially aktaf) were also used by the early Muslims but potsherds (khaaza), wooden tablets and flat white stones (lakha) were rarely used. The use of parchments called raaq or jild (finished leather), because of high price, was limited to the writing of documents and making of copies of the Qur'an. Papyrus called Qurias Misi was another material for writing. It was made of a plant of the sedge family grown on the banks of the Nile from where it spread all over the world, but the last two materials for long writing were limited in quantity and being costly were beyond the means of the commoners. By the time of the Umayyads, the wide expansion of Islamic education and learning needed cheap materials in appreciable quantity for writing and translating books in large numbers and the need was fulfilled by the manufacture of paper in the 'Arab world and the interest taken by the calligraphists. The Arabs learnt the art of manufacturing paper from the Chinese in the early eighth century A.C., but the earliest manuscript written on paper are at Baghdad; dated 256H/870 A.C. and at Cairo, dated 265H/879-9 A.C. Criticizing the Berber merchants Maqdisi (Kitab Ahsan al-Taqasim) Leiden, 1906, p.239) writes in 985 A.C. that they carried their documents and the Holy Qur'an written on pieces of leather while Andalusion Muslims had already become experts in utilizing paper as writing material. In 947 A.C. the Byzantine ambassador came to the court of Hajib al-mansur at Cordova with a letter written in Greek
upon skyblue paper. In the library of the Escorial near Madrid there are preserved a number of manuscripts in Arabic and Catalan written on cotton paper and dated as early as the 10th century A.C. The latest papyrus documents preserved in the Egyptian Khedivial and Vienna libraries are dated 319H/931 A.C. and 323H/935 A.C. respectively.

In the absence of the printing press and the modern devices of photo duplicating xerox, and other machines, the scribe was an obiquitous figure and he contributed largely to the art of 'Arabo-Persian calligraphy briefly reviewed in the text. The libraries also discussed therein shortly had a number of scribes on the permanent staff. To publish their work in order to meet the increasing demand of the serious students and interested readers some authors also employed calligraphers. Their services were also required at flourishing bookshops. Some of these scribes were themselves calligraphists of eminence like Ibn Nadim, the author of al-Fihrist, and Yaqt, the famous geographer (d. 1128 A.C.).

Calligraphy occupies the central place in Islamic art pervading Islamic civilization but ignoring the cultural importance of the subject, western art historians have focussed far more on Islam's figural than on its calligraphic arts. The impact of Islamic calligraphy is remarkably noticed on the Muslim architecture, especially mosques and tombs, minor and industrial arts, miniature paintings and numismatics, a subject which needs separate treatment and readers may be referred to the present author's paper read in the First International Seminar on the Arts in Islamic Lands held at Farnham Castle not far from London on March 26-28, 1982, and to his other paper on Islamic Calligraphy published in the journal Asiatic Society of Bangladesh Dacca, 1981. Realizing the cultural importance of Islamic Calligraphy now interest is growing to hold exhibitors and conferences in Asia, Europe and America and to write papers and books on its different aspects. The present memoir is partly the result of the same interests. It will be commendable if the impact of Islamic Calligraphy is studied thoroughly from the artistic point of view in relation to other fine arts focusing duly its impact on Muslim architecture, other fine arts and numismatics.

SECTION I

ARABIC WRITING

Palaeography:- Arabic writing which owed its origin to Syriac and spread throughout Arabia from Hirah or Anbar \(^1\) might have remained confined in Arabia but for Islam whose wide expansion made it the language of the people in the surrounding countries and al-Maghrib (North Africa and Spain). It was Islam which helped it in overpowering the Syriac and Greek writings in Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia, the Pahlavi script in Persia, Coptic in Egypt and Berber in North Africa and suppressed their growth and expansion for some centuries to come.

In their earliest stages Arabic consonant letters did not have dots and diacritical signs (\(\text{t}^{\prime}\text{rab}\)) but after the spread of Islam when non-Arabs accepted Islam they felt difficulty in reciting their religious scriptures correctly with confidence which necessitated the introduction of short vowels and the writing of Arabic grammatical inflection (\(\text{t}^{\prime}\text{rab}\)). The newly founded cities of Basrah and Kufah by the second Caliph Hadrat 'Umar played their special roles in the development of Arabic script and grammar and in the growth of punctuation and \(\text{t}^{\prime}\text{rab}\) system in which case the services of Abdu'l Asawd al-Du'ali (d. 688 A.C.) and Khalil ibn Ahmad will always be appreciated.

Besides the great similarity of the Arabic letters with the syriac and Hebrew writings in form and character their ancient numerical arrangement called \(\text{abjad}\) is also the same. The discovery of a number of papyri inscriptions proves that their scripts do not differ essentially from the ordinary cursive script called \(\text{naskh}\) by the Arabs.

The discovery of two inscriptions which are the earliest monuments of Arabic writing e.g. the trilingual (Greek, Syriac and Arabic) inscriptions of Zebed which dates from 512 A.C. and the bilingual (Greek and Arabic) inscription of Harran in the Lija dating from 568
A.C. shows a close resemblance to a number of inscriptions discovered from the Sinai peninsula. The Sinaitic inscription is written in Nabataean language, a dialect of Aramaic. The type of writing of these inscriptions is later than that of the other Nabataean inscriptions found scattered from Damascus to Madinah dating from the beginning of the Christian era. They represent the cursive writing used by the Nabataeans in everyday life especially in their capital Petra in the second and third centuries of Christian era. The cursive writing was developed earlier to the stiff angular script of the coins and inscriptions. It is too technical a subject to be discussed elaborately here. The earliest Arabic documents discovered so far bear a striking resemblance to the Naskh writing of modern Arabic. The next development in Arabic palaeography is the introduction of the stiff angular script called Kufi. Thus the views ‘Naskhi writing is a development of the stiff angular script’ held for long is not correct.

The Nabataean or Syriac cursive writing was further simplified and developed into the Arabic script towards the end of the fifth century of the Christian era. The present arrangement of the Arabic letters with strokes to join one with another dates back to the pre-Islamic period. The Maghribi writing which originated towards the second century of Hijrah era and differed from the oriental (Masriqi) arrangement of the Arabic letters corresponds partly to the old Nabataean order and partly to the peculiar arrangement of the Arabic letters. Before the advent of Islam the cursive style of Arabic had already developed the fundamental characteristic of Arabic script namely the ligatures which joined one letter with the other.

To obviate the double insufficiency of the original alphabet e.g. to distinguish between letters of the same group but of different sound and to show with what vowel a letter was to be enounced l’rah signs, dots and short vowels had to be introduced. Setting aside the claim of the Arabs, that dots were invented by them to distinguish letter of similar form and shape, Moritz opines that following the model of the Syriac writing dots had been introduced before the advent of Islam although exact date of their introduction he could not determine and adds that dots were certainly used in the first century of Muslim era though not extensively as it was done later.²

Towards the end of the first and beginning of the second century one dot of ٩ (qaf) was placed in Egypt sometimes above and at other times beneath the letter and in Palestine it was put below while ٩ (fe) was given no dot. In the second century ٩ was given one dot beneath the letter (٩) and later above it (٩) and thereupon ٩ (qafl) was given two dots. The Maghribi writing still retains the old punctuations of ٩ = ٩ (qafl) and ٩ = ٩ (fe).

Moritz claims that the short vowel signs (fathah = ِ, Kasrah = َ and dammah = ُ) were borrowed from the Syriac and they were indicated by putting one dot in the case of ٩ (a) above the letter, in the case of ٩ (u) before the letter and in the case of ٩ (i) below the letter and the nunation ( ) was expressed by doubling the dots. Abu'l Aswad al-Du'ali is credited, according to Ibn Khallikan, with the introduction of vowel signs: fathah one dot above the letter (ِ), dammah a point before the letter (ِ) and Kasrah, a point beneath the letter (َ), which we still find in some of the old Kufic manuscripts of the Qur'an marked in red and sometimes blue. The diacritical signs were written with black ink and vowel points were used of different colour in the ancient manuscripts. Hughes³, while making assessment of Ibn Khallikan’s statements on the introduction of dots and vowel signs, tries to harmonise them by concluding that Abu'l Aswad ad-Du'ali invented simple vowel points (nuqat), Nasr ‘Asim introduced tanwin by following Abu'l Aswad and doubling points and Yahya ibn Ya'mar, who had acquired his knowledge of grammar from Abu'l Aswad al-Du'ali, completed the system by devising the 'jam, diacritical signs of the consonants. Later, points, as short vowel signs, were replaced with the shorter forms of ٩, ِ and ِ, the long vowels, fathah Kasrah and dammah (َِ, ِ and َِ) by Khalil ibn Ahmad, the founder of the Science of Arabic prosody and rhetoric. Thus the short vowels were derived from the weak consonants (long vowels) themselves. Towards the end of the 7th century A.C. the short vowels were used only with Kufic script in copying the Qur'an.

Calligraphy:- Viewing fine handwriting is a pleasure to the eye, joy to the heart and fragrance to the soul, because of the religious restrictions on the representation of living beings the early Muslims stimulated the art along decorative channels - specially in the realm of book production, in the art of copying and illuminating manuscripts, Islamic calligraphy may, therefore conveniently claim a place among the greatest achievements of man's artistic activity. Of the
two elementary styles of Arabic script viz naskhi and Kufi, the cursive and angular, the latter was selected as the script of the government offices. In the beginning for about four centuries Arabic was used immensely in highly literary productions but gradually it gave way to artistic and decorative character. A number of manuscripts were written in different styles of Arabic writing and a number of monuments were decorated with Arabic inscriptions specially in Kufic characters. Because of its monumental character, the angular Kufic script drew the attention of artists so much that while achieving perfection in ornamental lines it lost its original purpose as the script of a language after about three centuries of its monoply giving place to its rival the cursive script of the people. For ornamental purpose it was, however, used for two centuries more till it became obsolete.

The origin of the Kufic or the angular style of Arabic script is traced back to about one hundred years before the foundation of Kufah (17 H/638 A.C.) to which town it owes its name because of its development there. It was here that this style was used for official purpose. For the first two centuries of Hijra era it did not become a decorative style. A copy of the Qur’an dated 168H/784-5 A.C. is written in simple Kufic.

The cursive (Naskhi), Himyarite and monumental form of Arabic script, is derived from the Nabataean which is itself drawn from the Phoenecian of the 8th century B.C. Some Himyarite inscriptions adorned in conventional styles with animate and other objects and the Sabaean inscriptions decorated with ornamental design have come to light. Because of the writing materials being hard they were written in angular form. The other more common form of writing was cursive which was developed into Arabic script before the angular Kufic style came into use and was written on soft material like papyrus and parchment. Historically Arabic is the youngest script of the world but it spread very widely along with Arab conquest and trade and became only second to Roman script in the world.

Coming into close contact with the Syriac when the cursive script was developed in the style of the Syriac, angular letter of Arabic writing came into being. The oblique and vertical lines are the main features of Kufic writing. By the end of the second century of Hijra era it reached its extreme angular character. By the middle of the 4th century of Hijra era the Kufic gave way to the Naskhi style. With the fall of the Fatimids who patronised the Kufic form of writing, it became obsolete. Intertwining and interlacing floral and geometrical forms of the Kufic evolved in the 5th and 6th centuries of the Hijra. From the very primitive stage Kufic possessed a vigorous decorative character. Vertically short its letters intensify by contrast the force of the originals in which length and weight are increased by the close crowding of the heavy loops.

Abu‘l Aswan (d. 69H/688 A.C.), a disciple of Hadrat ‘Ali, is credited with the improvement of the orthography of the Qur’an, introduction of vowel signs and diacritical marks. His system was followed for about a century. Then came Khalid b Yazid, who illuminated the Qur’an with gold and carved golden inscriptions on the Prophet’s Mosque, Khalil ibn Ahmad (d. 170H/786-7 A.C.) the grammarian, and ‘Ali ibn Kusai (182H/798 A.C.), the teacher of Ma‘mun al-Rashid, further developed the Kufic style but it reached its excellence in the hand of Ibn Muqlah (338H/949-50 A.C.), the renowned court artist of al-Qahir Il‘lallah, the Abbasid Caliph. He invented five main styles which survived the Kufic and wrote a book on calligraphy in verse. The Persians had invented seven main styles of Pahlavi writing according to the subject matter of pre-Islamic days. Under Islam, they preferred Kufi in the beginning and Naskhi later. Dateable 10th century Kufic calligraphy is available from Persia. The Kufic forms were well adapted to the decorative style of the period.

For centuries Kufi and Naskhi were used side by side. The cursive (round curve) variety of the Arabic script which came to be known as Naskhi continued to be used for common purposes, in making correspondence and writing books, and developed unnoticed replacing the Kufic. Ultimately it came to be recognised as the script adopted by the government. Incorporating the orthographical improvements which had been worked out in the Kufic appeared fully developed with vowel signs, punctuations and diacritical signs. While Kufic developed in the lines of ornamental rhythm and decorative style it became a dead style for writing purposes, the Naskhi was developed in the lines of grace keeping the genuine features of the script and increasing the longevity. The calligraphists beautified the Naskhi script by changing the proportions of strokes and curves of its letters after the liking of the readers to secure better appreciation. They changed angles of the Kufi scripts into round curves and
let strokes follow the natural sweep of the hand without interfering with the outlines of their anatomy and their orthography. They tried to express their emotion through the medium of linear rhythm making letters graceful.

Through gradual development of the Naskhi script, scores of new styles came in but only a few of them could survive the taste of the readers as they were products of fancy and did not evince the utility of art, a defect which also proved suicidal in the case of ornamental Kufic. Of its offshoots the Gulzar, the Tughrah, the Ta’us and the Zulf-i-Urus were set apart for displaying the ingenuity and ornamental fancy. Throughout the course of the development of Arabic script, the tendency of the calligraphists had been to simplify the complicated and angular script to an easier and the more round one.

The Naskh representing the cursive Kufic style is softened to broader curves and freer sweeps. Its curves are neither perfectly round nor oval which is the characteristic of the Nasta’liq. Retaining slightly its angular origin, it holds a middle position between the Kufic and Naskh. In the process of its development towards the round script, Nasta’liq, the Naskh was marked distinctly by its offshoots, Thuluth and Riqa’. It is mostly used by Arabic speaking people while Nasta’liq is peculiar to the Persian and the Urdu.

The Maghribi, the earliest variety of the Naskhi, is drawn directly from the Kufic of the second century A.H. It was originally known as Qairawani, derived from Qayrawan, the Muslim Capital of al-Maghrib. Algerian and Tunisian maghrabi styles did not differ but the Fasi style was rounder than the Algerian variety of the Naskh. With the foundation of Qayrawan in 670 A.C. an intellectual centre was developed in the West. Under the patronage of Aghlabids of North Africa a Qairawani style of Arabic writing developed and under that of the Umayyads in Spain an Andalusian, the former being more stiff and the latter, round. The Maghribi style which is partly naskhi though more akin to Kufic preserves the punctuations of the second century Kufic writings as in the case of ﷲ (fe) and ﷷ (qaf) with one dot but difference in its position.

Angular script prevailed more in Persia and its surroundings than in the Arabic speaking countries and was more common than the Naskh. With the blending of the two scripts, Kufic and Pahlavi, the old Persian script, there developed a new round style, Ta’liq, which was later under the impact of the Naskh gave birth to Nasta’liq. Although the latter was introduced much earlier, books were written in this style not before the 13th Century A.C. Persian verses were composed and marginal commentaries and interlinear translations of the Quranic verses were made in this style. Main contents of the Qur’an were never written then in the Nasta’liq, but always in Naskh. Its strokes are long and bluntly pointed. They flow easily straight or horizontally but they never descend slantingly as they do in Thuluth, Riqa’, Ra’ihani, Divani and Shikastah. It has been rightly observed by a European orientalist “while Naskh is substantial, equable and assured, and Ta’liq forceful, dominating, arbitrary, Nasta’liq is polished, elegant, easy and casual, the expression of a highly civilized sophisticated people.”

Under the Mamluks of Egypt there were current six official scripts as enumerated by Qalqashandi (8th Century A.H.) in his voluminous work:

a. Al-Tumar al-Kamil, written in several types and used in the official correspondence of the Sultans;

b. Mukhtasar al-Tumar, written in two variations al-Muhaqqaq and al-Thulth;

c. Al-Thulth has again two forms, al-Thaqil and al-Khafis;

d. Al-Tawqi’, written in three forms Tawqi’, Badr al-Kamilah, and Walayat — they are imperfect distortions of the Nasta’liq style;

e. Al-Ghubar, written in one form only; and

f. Al-Riqa’, written in three forms.

Under the Turks in the 13th Century A.H./19th Century A.C., there were used thirty forms of Arabic writing, out of these six were more prevalent:

a. Divanih, written in two forms, Jali and Khafi. The former bold letter was used by Imperial chancellery and the latter small form was used side-by-side with Ta’liq;

b. Thuluth, used for ornamental purpose;

c. Ta’liq, round script, used for writing poetry only;

d. Naskhi, cursive, used for writing books especially scientific and religious works;

e. Riqa’, an official script of the Turks occasionally used in private
life;
f. Ajazah, rarely used.

Some of these important forms of writing need description to understand their nature and distinctive features.

Thulth is the ornamental variety of the Naskh style. It differs from the Naskh only in proportion of its curves and strokes which are about three times of the size of those of the Naskhi style. It is written in bold curves and wide swinging waves. In sweep it resembles the Divani style and also the Shikastah.

Riq'a is more ornamental than Thulth. It is very graceful and its strokes move like a creeping snake or the ripples of a stream.

Muhaqqaq is also a decorative style, the letters being thick and bold characters. In curves and strokes it is similar to another style of writing called Raiyhani, but bolder in characters. Its strokes are not slanting but break abruptly.

Divani, written diagonally from the top to the bottom of the page or vice-versa ascending elliptically. It is an offshoot of Naskh. In its intricate varieties here the letters run together rendering the reading difficult.

Zulf-i-urus is a decorative style of the Nasta'liq. Its strokes are thick in the middle and end in straight points unlike Thulth without turning up in curve.

Ghubar is a very fine form of writing, the letters are small and appear like fleeting dust.

Mahi, Gulzar, and Ta'us are purely ornamental treatment of other styles and they are not styles themselves. They are not written but drawn in outline producing fish, flowers or birds like peacocks, and filled in with decorative lines with animals or flowers.

The Larzah is also not a style. It is written in such a way that the script appears to have been inscribed by a hand shaking with excitement.

Tughra owes its origin to the Turkish ruler, an official monogram composed of a fixed protocol. It is used as an amulet by the superstitious persons. A Quranic verse or a common prayer is drawn in Tughra style composing outlines of a bird or a tiger, or an elephant or other animals excepting unclean ones. Names of Allah, Muhammad (Prophet), Fatimah, 'Ali and other caliphs are also written in Tughra characters. It was also used for monumental inscriptions of which the striking one is in the Masjid-i-Jami', Abarquh.

Shikastah is a broken form of Nasta'liq writing introduced during the Safavid period in the 16th century with a tendency of reverting to Ta'liq. The relation which Divani bears to Arabic Naskh, is born by Shikastah to the Persian Nasta'liq.

As it took a long time to write in Nasta'liq, Khat-i-Shafi'a was invented for daily and rough use about the time when Shikastah writing was used in Mughal India. Both these writings were used mostly in the courts and offices. Because of the droppage of dots and the use of broken letters the reading of the Shikastah style is difficult. Among the best components of the Shikastah were Shafi'a (d. 1152/1739), Darvish 'Abd al Majid of Taligun (d. 1206/1791) and his pupil Mirza Kujak of Isfahan and among other calligraphers of this style were Gulistan, Qa'im Muqam and Amin al-Dawlah. It was invented by Shamba or Shafi'a and perfected by the famous 'Ali Riza 'Abbas, Darvish 'Abd al-Majid being the supreme master of this style.

Calligraphists:- The profession of a calligrapher was one of honour and dignity in Islam. Calligraphy has a subtle affinity with human and floral forms and possesses a remarkable adaptability to pictorial rhythm. As an art calligraphy had become so important that professional artists, skilled men of arts and crafts, learnt and practised it in order to achieve success in their trades. The jeweller, the goldsmith, the copper and ironsmith, the seal engraver, the lapidary, the wood and stone engravers and the potters all tried to achieve efficiency in calligraphy and they often made themselves masters of several styles and wrought their wares with beautiful inscriptions. On aims and methods of scribes and calligraphers there was written Kitab al-Kuttab by Ibn Durustuya (258-347H/872-952 A.C.)
Scholars, kings and nobles all tried for the cultivation of calligraphy. The Muhaddith Ibn-al-Jawzi and Jawhari, the author of the Sahah, were great calligraphers. Wazir Abu Ja’far ibn ‘Abbas, and Andalusian, was a great calligraphist. Safinah of Seville was unparalleled in the art of calligraphy. The great Ibn al-Haytham, Ibn ‘Abdu’l-lah, the great abid of Fez and Yaqut, the author of Mu’jam al-Buldan were great scribes of the time. Because of his achievement in calligraphy al-Juvaini was called Fakhrul’l-Kuttab and Shah Jahan the Mughal emperor of India, the prophet of calligraphy.

Such being the case there was hard competition among the scribes and calligraphists; some like Yahya Ibn Adi excelled in speed writing one hundred pages in twenty four hours, others in enhancing the quality of their writing achieved name and fame.

Qutbah, who worked for Umayyad Caliphs, developed four types of writing for official correspondence namely Jali, Tumar, Thuluthayn and Thuluth e.g. mighty on full scrolls, boldface (scroll type), two-thirds type and one-third type. Caliph Al-Walid preferred large-scale writing for full scrolls while ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al’-Aziz in order to economizing the use of papyrus ordered for minute writing. Sa’d was the earliest monumental calligrapher of Caliph Walid’s time. He wrote Quranic inscriptions in gold on the gibliyah wall of Prophet’s Mosque at Madinah and copied the Qur’an and some verses and episodes in a beautiful hand.

Of the early Abbasid period Ahmad ibn Abi Khalid known as al-Ahwal al-Muharrir (the squint-eyed clean copyist) was the greatest calligraphist of the time. He flourished under Ma’mun al-Rashid. While the beauty of the calligraphy was appreciated by the elite, scholars like Ibn Qutaybah (213-76/282-89) complained that for the sake of their beautiful hand and artistic skill the calligraphists sacrificed their scholarly objectives. ‘Iraqi, Rayasi and many other types of script were introduced under the Abbasids but very few of them have survived.

‘Ali b.’Ubayd al-Raihani (d. 322/934) was a well-known calligraphist of the Abbasid period. He introduced a type of Naskhi writing similar to Muhajjaaq which came to be known as Raihani after his name.

Wazir ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Ali ibn Muqla (272-328/886-940) wrote a poem on calligraphy. He formulated rules for Naskhi character of writing and introduced or developed four forms of Arabic writing Thulth, Muhajjaaq, Riqa and Tawqi’. He did not invent Naskhi as reported by Ibn Kallikan and followed by others. In calligraphy he was the disciple of al-Ahwal al-Muharrir.

Abu’l Hasan ‘Ali ibn Hilal surnamed Ibn al-Bawwab (d. 413/1022 A.C.) was one of the greatest calligraphists of his age. On his death Ibn Kallikan composed the following verses:-

“Thy loss was felt by the writers of former times, and each successive day justifies their grief. The ink-bottles are, therefore, black with sorrow, and the pens are rent through affliction”

A great calligraphist Najm al-Din Abu Bakr Muhammad was born at Ravand near Kashan in the 12th century. He achieved mastery over seventy different styles of writing the chief among which were Naskhi, Thulth, Riqa and Muhajjaaq. He learnt the art of calligraphy for ten years from his uncle Taj al-Din Ahmad, a great calligraphist of his time. Najm al-Din earned his livelihood by copying, illuminating and binding the copies of the Qur’an. He wrote a book on the principles of calligraphy and included a chapter on it in his History of the Saljuqs. Mahmud ibn Muhammad another maternal uncle of Najm-al-Ravandi taught calligraphy to the Saljuq King Tughril in 579/1183 and helped him in the illumination of the 30 parts of the Qur’an copied by Tughril himself in beautiful hand. In 585/1189 Mahmud was sent on an embassy to the Atabek Qizil Arslan of Mazandaran with a quatrain written and ornamented with gilt letters by Sultan Tughril.

Ghulam Muhammad, Haft Qalami (the master of seven styles) of the Mughal court, was fond of visiting calligraphists and discussing problems of penmanship with them. Haft Qalami visited Hafiz Nurullah who had transcribed by then Haft-band Kashi at the request of Asaf al-Daulah Bahadur and was very much delighted on seeing the bold and fine varieties of the Aqa’s penmanship. 8

Mir Khalilullah Shah was greatly honoured for his penmanship. He copied the Nau-Ras and presented it to Ibrahim ‘Adil Shah, the King
of the Deccan, who gave him a seat by his side on the throne and his nobles escorted him to his residence. For his calligraphy he was once offered Rupees seven hundred which he did not accept but parted with it on receiving an Arabian horse.

Jamaluddin Abu Durr Yaqt b. Yaqt ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Rumi al-Musta’sami (d. 698/1298 A.C.) flourished at the court of Musta’sam bi’l’lah the last Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad. Though the Naskh character was developed by Ibn Muqlah it achieved great perfection at the hand of Yaqt the greatest of Naskh writers. His father and grandfather had also excelled in the art of calligraphy before him. According to Haji Khalifah he was never excelled by anyone. Because of his reputation the specimen copy of his calligraphy was in great demand. His copies of the Dictionary of al-Jawhari were sold at one hundred dinars (£50.00) each. A copy of Ibn Sina’s Shifa he sent to Muhammad b. Tughlaq (d. 1324 A.C.), the Sultan of India, who sent two hundred million mithqals of gold coins in return which the proud calligraphist refused to accept considering it a meagre amount. A copy of the Qur’an transcribed by him in 688H/1289 A.C. is one of the principal treasures of Bankipur (Patna, India) Khuda Bakhsh Library.

Khwajah Mir ‘Ali Tabrizi, who traced his descent from Hadrat Husain bin ‘Ali was a contemporary of Amir Timur (d. 807/1405 A.C.). Although Nasta’liq character of writing was introduced before Mir ‘Ali, still there was roughness in the style which he removed and brought perfection to the style by making it methodical in 823H/1420 A.C. He was in the service of Timur who designated him Qiblat al-Kuttab, model of calligraphers. He was himself very much conscious of his talents to which he referred in his poems (Majmu’ah) where a copy of the collection of his selected poems, bearing Shah Jahan’s autograph is preserved in the Khuda Bakhsh Library. The Mughal emperor Jahangir was a great admirer of his calligraphy for the culture of which he established a school to be followed by Mir’Imad and others.

The style which he initiated was developed by great calligraphists of the time like his son ‘Abd Allah who taught lessons in the art of calligraphy to Maulana Ja’far of Tabriz and Maulana Azhar Tabrizi (d. 880/1475-6). The last one was entitled ustad-i-ustadan ‘master of masters. A MS. of the Shah Namah, copied by Azhar, was preserved in

the library of Riza Shah Pahlavi of Iran. Maulana Azhar transmitted his style to his son Muhammad and his pupil Sultan ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Mashhadi (d. 1515 A.C.)

Sultan ‘Ali Mashhadi received patronage from the Timurid King Sultan Husain Mirza of Harat (1470H/1506), the patron of the great painter Bihzad. He is credited with having perfected Nasta’liq calligraphy. Some Timurid Kings like Baysunghur (1397-1433) and Ibrahim Sultan were themselves masters of fine penmanship. Baysunghur established an academy at Harat where worked forty painters, penmen, gilders, illuminators and bookbinders. Sultan Husain Baysqara, the last of the Timurid Kings of Harat, was another great bibliophile in whose atelier Sultan ‘Ali copied manuscripts and Bihzad and his pupils adorned them with elegant miniature paintings. The tradition built up by the Timurids was followed by the Safavids in Persia and the Mughals in India.

Muhammad Husain of Tabriz was the court calligraphist of Shah Tahmasp. One of his superb MSS was in the personal collection of Rai Bahadur Jalan of Patna (India).

Mir ‘Imad al-Husaini of Qazvin wrote in a Nasta’liq hand of great excellence. It achieved unapproachable mastery of the Nasta’liq style for which he was lavished with honour and money although he cared little for them because of his pride in his talent. The Safavid ruler Shah ‘Abbas I of Persia (1587-1625) keenly desired to own a copy of the Shahnamah transcribed by him. The Shah sent him seventy tumans with a request to copy the epic for him. After one year the Shah sent for the copy. Mir ‘Imad gave seventy lines in return for the gift he had received. The Shah felt offended and returned the seventy lines demanding seventy tumans back. Each line the calligraphist sold to his disciples for one tuman each and returned the amount to Shah ‘Abbas I. This impertinence enraged the Shah all the more and the artist was murdered by the King’s slave Mansur Misgar in 1024H/1615 A.C. The calligraphist received the highest approbation from Kings of distant realms. Jahangir, the Mughal emperor of India, wrote for him on receiving the news of his murder and was prepared to pay his weight in pearls to Shah ‘Abbas had he been sent to the Mughal emperor. Shah Jahan was so fond of collecting the specimen copies of his calligraphy that whoever presented him with a genuine work of ‘Imad he was conferred with the rank of Yaksadi (Centurion,
Saiyid ‘Ali Khan (Jawahir Raqam) bin Aqa Muqim came to India from Tabriz. The Mughal emperor Aurangzib employed him to teach calligraphy to the princes of the Royal family. He wrote after the style of Mir ‘Imad and Aqa Rashid very elegantly. For some time he worked as a curator of the Mughal Imperial Library and died suffering from madness in the Deccan in 1094H/1683 A.C.

Pen, Ink and Writing Materials:- The calligraphers were very particular about their writing materials. Reed pen or qalam having fine cut served the purpose of broader nib to write bold stroke and its edge being smooth it glided with ease over the paper enabling the hand to give fine swing and swell to the curved lines which is one of the chief beauties of the Arabic Persian writing.

As the beauty of writing depended very much on ink, it was prepared with great care and was made shining and durable by mixing chemicals. Ink was made up of lamp-black and vinegar or well beaten up and mixed with red ochre or yellow arsenic and camphor. The ink of ‘Shir Khurma’ was used in writing the copy of the famous Dictionary of Abu Nasr Isma’il b. Hammad al-Jawhari dated 648H/1250 A.C., which is preserved in the library of Aligarh Muslim University (India).

Information on writing materials before the introduction and wide circulation of paper we obtain from the traditions concerning the missionary epistles employed by the Prophet, the accounts of the collection of the Surahs (verses) of the Qur’an under the presidencies of Zaid ibn Thabit (12H/633-4 A.C.) and the Fihrist of Ibn Nadim.

Adim (leather) was the principal material for writing during the time of the Prophet and he used it in writing letters to various kings calling upon them to accept Islam. ‘Asib (palm leaf) was another material used by the Prophet in sending a missionary letter to the ‘Udhra. Pieces of camel’s bones (‘azam), especially adla’ (ribs) and aktaf (shoulder blades), were used as writing materials by the early Muslims. Wooden tablets (takhtah) and flat white stones (lakha) were also used sometimes. Khazaif or shaqaf (pot sherds or broken pieces of porcelain) were used for short notes in ancient time by the Greeks, Copts and Persians, but were rarely used by the Muslims.
The use of parchment called raqq and jild (finished leather) because of its high price was limited to the writing of documents and copying of the Qur'an. It was used in al-Maghrib for copying scriptures as late as the last part of the 4th and beginning of the 5th centuries of Hijra era. The great ‘Arab geographer Maqdisi records of its use in writing documents and copying the Qur'an in North Africa.

Papyrus called Qirtas Misri was made of a plant of the sedge family in Egypt from where it spread all over the world. Even after the introduction of paper it continued to be used as late as the middle of the 10th century A.C. The latest papyrus documents preserved in the Khedivial and Vienna libraries are dated 319H/931 and 323/935 A.C. respectively. It was replaced by paper a cheap and suitable material for writing. The earliest Baghdad MS. written on paper is dated 256H/870 A.C. and the Cairo MS. no. 6546 is dated 265H/878-9 A.C. Great technique was used in preparing smooth and coloured paper.

To improve the quality of the calligraphy the paper was pressed and made smooth by placing it in a well-levelled board of chestnut wood and polishing it with an egg of crystal of about half a pound’s weight. The Chinese were the first people in the world to practice the art of manufacturing paper from silk. After the conquest of Samargand in 704 A.C. the Arabs came into contact with the Chinese. In 706 the art of making paper from cotton was introduced at Makka by one Yusuf’ Amr.16 The ‘Arab general Zayyad ibn Sallh as ransom got the Muslims trained in the art of paper making by the Chinese taken captives in the battle of the Talas River fought in Turkistan in 96H/751 A.C. and set these prisoners free to embark on Chinese junk's ready for sail in the Persian Gulf.17 According to al-Nadim, the author of al-Fihrist, there existed seven different kinds of paper in the 2nd half of the first century of the Hijra era. In India good quality paper came from Kashmir. According to Idrisi, Spain supplied good quality paper to North Africa as early as the 12th century A.C. Arabic MSS. on cotton paper is still preserved in the Escorial Library of Spain and some of them are dated as early as the tenth century. Paper was manufactured from cotton, linen and shahdany (cotton) at San Felipe (Jativa) and Valencia. In early thirteenth century its manufacture was introduced by Alfonso X (d. 1284 A.C.) in Castile from where it passed to France in 1270 A.C. The example of France was followed by other European countries — Italy, Germany and

10. Ibid, p.81.
11. Les Calligraphes et les Miniaturistes, by Huart, p.85.
12. Tadhirbh-i-Khusnavis, pp.52-42.
13. Ibid, pp.92, 93.
15. Tadhirbh-i-Khusnavis, p.80.
16. Al-Ghazzal and Casirqueted by Lue viard, Historia de los Arabes y de los Moros de España, Barcelona, 1844, p.239.
18. Already composed see above.
a. Simple Kufic A.C., AH (790 AD). Simple Kufic is characterised by straight vertical strokes and angular forms of letters.

b. Foliated Kufic AH 341 (952 AC). The vertical strokes end in leaves and half-palmettes.

c. Floriated Kufic AH 243 (848 AC). The ending of the letters is enhanced by the floral designs and half-palmettes, while the round forms are rendered as rosettes.

d. Naskhi AH 684 (1285 AC) Naskhi is a cursive form of Arabic writing, here the verticals are not so important; some of the foliation has been taken over from Kufic.

e. Thuluth (1348 AC). Thuluth is a more cursive and more elegant form than Naskhi. The words are placed above each other in two or even more lines.

f. Nastaliq AH 950 (1543 AC). In Nastaliq the horizontal lines and round forms are exaggerated, dots casually placed, lines are not always straight, all of which make the Nastaliq a very elegant form of writing.
Detail of a Commemorative stone from the palace of Barbak Shah, Gaur, Bengal, mid-fifteenth century. Photograph courtesy of the University Museum, Philadelphia.
Egypt; fourteenth century
H. 24 cm  W. 23.8 cm
The Textile Museum.
SECTION II

‘ARAB LIBRARIES

CHAPTER I

UMAYYAD AND ABBASID LIBRARY

The beginning of Muslim libraries like those of the Jews and the Christians goes back to the collection of religious books. As synagogue, church and monastic libraries changed into public school, college, university libraries of today, the Mosque library of the early Muslim period developed into the Madrasah and University libraries of the middle ages. By the time Prophet Muhammad (peace of God be upon him) died there were only a few verses (Surahs) of the Holy Qur’an in written form, some copies of letters sent to various rulers calling upon them to accept Islam and also copies of some treaties concluded with people of Madinah and other places to be preserved in Muslim libraries.

During the time of the early caliphs, the Holy Qur’an was compiled under the Chairmanship of Zayd ibn Thabit in 30H/651 A.C. to be enlisted as the first book in the history of Muslim libraries to which were added copies of some treaties made with the people conquered during the Khilafat period after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad. More than this could not be done as the Muslims were pre-occupied in the expansion of Islam and in setting up their administrative affairs.

Umayyad Library:— Although the collection of books and papers on history, biography, laws and traditions was begun as early as the days of Prophet and righteous Caliphs still the building up of libraries and translation of books from Greek into Arabic began under the Umayyads. By the time the Banu Umayyah came to power the situation had improved and the Muslims came into close contact with the Egyptians, Syrians, Greeks and Persians, but they were yet so busy with internal and external affairs, viz economic and social problems that they hardly found time to devote to the establishment of literary institutions except to the introduction and writing of a number of books on grammar, religious traditions, historical and geographical accounts, postal guides and translation of some Greek works into Arabic.

With the expansion of Islam when the non-Arabs accepted Islam and committed some orthographical mistakes in reciting their Holy scripture, Basrah and Kufah schools had to introduce rules of grammar for the new converts from the time of the third Caliph Hadrat ‘Uthman. The first historical work Kitab al-Muluk-wa-Akhbar al-Mada’in was written by ‘Abd bin Shari’ah b. Mu’awiyah. The latter’s grandson Khalid b. Yazid learnt chemistry from the Greek scholar of Alexandria namely Marionis and Istaftan al-Qadim translated for him some Greek works into Arabic. Khalid also had a number of books on philosophy and astronomy translated into Arabic from Greek and Hebrew to enrich his own collection. He himself wrote books like Kitab al-Harat, Kitab al-Sahifah al-Kabir and Kitab al-Sahifah al-Saghir.

The Tafsir (commentary) of the Qur’an written by S’id b. Jubair was preserved in the royal library of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwan, who had engaged scholars for writing books on various subjects. Under ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz the collection of traditions was made by Abu Bakr b. Hazm Ansari, the teacher of Imam Zuhri, and ‘Asim b. ‘Umar b. Qataadah. Ansari gave lessons on Maghazi and Manaqib. A book of his royal library written by Hakim Masir Joyah was translated from the Syriac. On the death of Walid b. Yazid when his collections were transferred from the library, the books written by Imam Zuhri alone had to be transported laden on the backs of several asses and camels. Under the Umayyads besides Khalid b. Yazith others were interested in building up their private libraries. Abu ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ala al-Ma’arri (d. 156/770), who had flourished towards the close of the Umayyad rule, is recorded by Ibn Khallikan to have collected books filling one of his rooms up to the ceiling.

Abbasid Library:— The Umayyad collections were appropriated by the Abbasids after their overthrow and the private collections became richer and richer. The Abbasids patronised art and learning, opened translation bureau and established madrasahs and libraries. Throughout the four years of his rule the Abbasid Caliph al-Saffah remained occupied in state affairs finding little time to devote to literary activities. His brother and successor Abu Ja’far al-Mansur (754-75 A.C.), however, having established his dynasty firmly
devoted his times to literary pursuits. He opened a translation bureau, collected Greek, Persian and Sanskrit works in hundreds on philosophy, medicine, astronomy and other sciences and had them translated into Arabic. An Indian work on astronomy namely Siddhanta was received at Baghdad in 771 A.C., and translated into Arabic by Muhammad ibn al-Fazari. This was later used by al-Khwarizmi in the preparation of his astronomical tables, called Zijj. Besides the translation work, the composition of original books was also taken up seriously under the patronage of the Abbasid Caliphs.

As a result of the royal patronage to learning, public interest in the sale and purchase of books and papers increased and bookshops were opened in a number of cities. A special market called Suq al-Warracin grew up in Baghdad. It had about one hundred such shops. In the absence of printing presses, calligraphists and copyists were employed in libraries and shops to copy rare and valuable works to meet the increasing demand of scholars for such books and to copy text books for students and other customers thus standardising the prices of books and creating interest in the readers on large scale for building up their personal collections, some being scholars and teachers needed them, others being philanthropists decorated with them their drawing rooms. Among the libraries which grew up thus were of three types, mosque libraries, royal libraries and private collections.

Bayt al-Hikmah: In 145H/762 A.C. the foundation of the round city of Baghdad was laid by the Abbasid Caliph Abu Ja'far Mansur (d. 775 A.C.). This was the town which developed as a centre of Islamic civilization within the first fifty years of the Abbasid rule and reached its zenith under Harun and Ma'mun. The Abbasid Bayt al-Hikmah was a parallel institution to the Academy of Han-Lin-Yuan of Ming Huang, the Chinese emperor of T'ang Dynasty. The Chinese academy functioned up to the end of the Ming Dynasty (15th century). The first institution of higher scientific studies among the Arabs was Bayt al-Hikmah a combination of library, academy and translation bureau. It was founded on the bank of the Tigris at Baghdad by Harun al-Rashid in 830 A.C. The translation work under royal patronage had started earlier under Mansur. In the translation bureau works were translated into Arabic from Greek, Sanskrit and other non-Arabic languages and they have been enlisted by Haji Khalifah in his Kashf al-Zumun and by Ibn Nadim in al-Fihrist. In the conquest of Anqirah and 'Umuriah a rich collection of books was obtained which Harun entrusted to his Christian physician Yuhanna b. Aswiah to translate into Arabic. The famous geographer Yaqt states that 'Allan transcribed books in this institution for the Barmaki officials and Abbasid Caliph Harun and later also for his son Ma'mun al-Rashid.

The Abbasid Caliph Ma'mun engaged Ya'qub b. Ishaq 'al-Kindi, who wrote 282 books and memoirs on medicine, philosophy, music etc., for translating Aristotle's works into Arabic. Translators were generally paid in the weight of their translation and each copy of their works was sealed and signed by Ma'mun himself. Rare books were collected from distant places of Egypt, Syria, Persia and India. Hajjaj b. al-Batriq and the principal of the college, Salam by name, were sent to the Byzantine countries by Ma'mun to collect books of their choice. Qusta b. Luqa on his own went to the Greek countries in search of books. Hunain b. Ishaq went in search of Kitab al-Burhan to Palestine, Egypt and Syria and obtained only half of it at Damascus. Ibn Abi al-Hasir, a famous book binder of the time, was engaged in the Bayt'ul Hikmah. Hindu, Parsi, Christian and Jews engaged the Muslims were on the staff of Bayt'ul Hikmah. Duban, the Indian physician, Hunain ibn Ishaq, Yuhanna b. Aswiah, Qusta b. Luqa, Sahl b. Harun and Abu Ja'far Yahya b. Adi all worked in the Bayt'ul Hikmah. Most of the employees received Rs. 2,500/- (£125.00) at the present rate. The famous scientist mathematician Muhammad b. Musa al-Khwarizmi, who invented algebra and wrote the Kitab al-Jabr Wa'l Muqabilah on the request of Ma'mun, was also attached to this institution.

Among the old rare collection of Bayt al-Hikmah was a letter of Prophet's grandfather 'Abd al-Muttalib written on leather, the Almagest of Batlimus which was translated into Arabic and a rare work consisting of about 100 pages written by Naushirawson-wazir. This institution survived under different names up to the 12th century but it was overshadowed by the Nizamiyah college founded by Nizam al-Mulk Tusi in the 11th century A.C.

Later when political power passed from the hands of the Abbasid Caliphs to those of the army generals and sultans, the Saljuqs and the Buwayhids topped the list in patronising learning and science.
Nizamiyah:- Nizam al-Mulk Tusi, the prime minister of the Saljuq Sultan Malikshah, established a chain of madrasahs at Baghdad, Basrah, Mosul, Isfahan, and other towns. The most famous of these colleges was that of Baghdad. The Nizamiyah of Baghdad was founded in 457H/1065 A.C. and opened in Dhiaq'd459/ Sept. 1067. It cost Tusi 60,000 dinars. The first professor of this college was Abu Nasr ibn al-Sabbagh who was dismissed after twenty days and Abu Ishaq al-Shirazi was appointed as its principal in his place. The professor who was called Sayykh had under him two or more mu'ids (repeaters) to read over the lecture after class and explain it to the less gifted students.10 It was in this college that the famous mystic al-Ghazzali lectured for four years (1091-5 A.C.)11 and because of his learning and scholarship he became chief mudarris at an early age of thirty four only. Scholars like al-Mawardi and Ibn Mubarak were associated with it in 1104 and 1184 A.C. respectively and it was here that among the later teachers the biographer of Salahuddin Ayyubi, namely Baha'uddin delivered lectures. Shaykh Sa'di was one of the renowned students of this college. It was a theological madrasah particularly for the study of Ash'ari and Shafi'i rites. 'Ali ibn Muhammad, a teacher of this institution, who taught grammar, was accused of following Shi'ism and dismissed.12 It was visited by travellers like Ibn Jubayr in 1185 and Ibn Battutah in 1327 A.C. According to Ibn Jubayr there were thirty colleges in Baghdad, all supported by endowments and Nizamia was the most important of all. Teachers and writers received fixed salary and the students were granted stipends all from the endowed properties. The annual expenditure of the college amounted to sixty to seventy million dinars.

The library attached to the Nizamiyah college had magnificent collections, which were mostly bequeathed waqfs and gifts. Muhib al-Din ibn al-Najjarf at Baghdad, according to the historian Ibn al-Athir, endowed two of his personal collections valuing one thousand dinars to its library. Whenever Nazamu'l Mulk Tusi came to Baghdad he used to visit this library and devoted sometimes to the reading of books. He was the man who wrote Siyasat Namah or Siyar al-Mulk, which was prescribed for long for civil service examination at London. He was murdered by a madman in 485H/1092 A.C.

Abu Zakariya Tabrizi was appointed as a librarian of Nizamiyah Madrasah on a very high salary. He was followed by Ya'qub b. Sulaiman Asqarali as librarian. In 1116 A.C. the institution caught fire but the books were removed undamaged. A new building for the library was constructed at the order of Caliph al-Nasir (1180-1225), who donated to it his own collections of thousands of books. It was a very rich library having valuable and magnificent collections although the number of books is not known. It survived the catastrophe which befell the city of Baghdad during Hulagu Khan's capture of the Abbasid capital in 1258 A.C. and later invasions of the Tartars to be finally merged with her sister institution Mustansiriya in 1393, two years after the capture of Baghdad by Timur.

Mustansiriya:- The college under the name of Mustansiriya was founded on the eastern side of Baghdad by the Abbasid Caliph, last but one, al-Mustansir Billah (1226-1242 A.C.) in 625H/1228 A.C. and completed in six years. Rare and valuable books laden on 160 camels were transferred to it from the Imperial Library. Its ruins on the banks of the Tigris are still visible. It topped the list of many madrasahs: founded by Mustansir. A hospital and a library were attached to it. Ibn Battutah gives a detailed description of its building and describes the function of the seminary and library.13 On its pattern the early European universities were developed.14 The library possessed rare and valuable works on various subjects. There was a good arrangement of open shelf system. Students had free access to the well arranged shelves and were allowed to use even the rare manuscripts. Beside stack rooms and reading rooms there were also lecture rooms for teaching astronomy and other sciences in addition to traditions of the Prophet. The library was visited daily by Mustansir Caliph.

On the very first day of the opening ceremony of the college Caliph Mustansir Billah donated his own personal collection and appointed men to do accession and classification work. The Caliph continued donating books from time to time. Donation of books was also received from scholars and philanthropists. At one time it contained about 40,000 volumes. It has been described as a unique collection by historians like Ibn al-Athir. The library work was supervised by trustworthy persons including his son Prince al-Musta'sim, who, on his accession to the Khilafat, took the same keen interest in the affairs of the library and the college as his father had been doing.
The library was visited by distinguished scholars and travellers. It operated until the Mongols entered Baghdad and destroyed it. A large number of its collections were removed by Hulagu Khan to Maragha where famous astronomer Nasir al-Din al-Tusi had laid the foundation of an observatory in 648H/1250 A.C. A manuscript of Mustansiriyyah library is now to be found in the Bibliotheca Nationale, Paris.

Libraries under the Buwayhids (945-1055 A.C.):- Like the Saljuqs, the Buwayhids also patronised art and literature. Bakhtiyar and Habashi, the two sons of the Buwayhid Amir Mu‘izz al-Dawlah, were lovers of learning and vied with each other for the acquisition of documents. Among the confiscated property of the defeated Habashi was his library at Basrah containing 15,000 books exclusive of unbound volumes and loose sheets.\(^1\)

The greatest of the Buwayhid sultans, ‘Adud al-Dawlah (972-82) was a great bibliophile. He had his library at his capital city of Shiraz housed in a separate building and administered by a Wakil (trustee) and Khazin (treasurer) and Mushrif (collector), all chosen from the trustworthy people of Shiraz. It was visited by Maqdisi, the famous geographer, during the time of ‘Adud al-Dawlah, he left behind its vivid description. The geographer says that the books were well arranged on shelves with separate cupboards and catalogues of books subjectwise and adds that the library contained the copies of all the books published up to his time.\(^2\) The minute details of the Sultan’s library are given by another famous geographer Yaqut in the following words:

“The library consists of one long vaulted room, annexed to which are store rooms. The prince had made along the large room and the store chambers, scaffoldings about the height of a man three yards wide, of decorated wood which have shelves from top to bottom. The books are arranged on the shelves and for every branch of learning there are separate scaffolds. There are also catalogues in which all the titles of the books are entered. I also saw the ventilation chamber to which the water was carried by pipes, surrounding it on every side in circulation.”\(^3\)