as the width of the pen. The standard Alif was a straight vertical stroke measuring a specific number of rhombic dots placed vertex to vertex, and the number of dots varied, according to style, from five to seven; the standard circle had a radius equal to Alif. Both standard Alif and standard circle were also used as basic geometric forms. It is beyond the scope of this study to describe Ibn Muqlah’s complex geometric and mathematical system further, save to say that he succeeded admirably in giving the art of calligraphy precise scientific rules, according to which each letter is rigorously disciplined and related (ma’nā) to the three standard units, the rhombic dot, the Alif and the circle. This new method of writing was called al-Khayt al-Mansūb, and it proved to be readily applicable. Ibn Muqlah is reputed to have pioneered its application to the six major cursive scripts mentioned earlier, as well as to a few others. The only surviving specimens believed to be in his hand are preserved in the Iraqi Museum in Baghdad. These consist of nine pages in Naskh and Thuluth, with a colophon notation attributing them to Ibn Muqlah.

Ibn Muqlah’s pupils, Ibn al-Simsamāni and Ibn Asad, continued much in the tradition of their master, and it fell to one of their pupils, a talented young artist called Abū I-Ma‘ṣar ‘Alī ibn Hilāl, better known as Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. 1022), to add significantly to Ibn Muqlah’s work. Without violating any of the rules, he managed with an artist’s soul to give grace and elegance to the geometric harmony of the letters designed by Ibn Muqlah. This more graceful style came to be known as al-Mansūb al-Fīlī (the elegant Mansūb). Ibn al-Bawwāb’s artistic contribution to Arabic calligraphy in general, and to the six scripts in particular, is valued as highly as that of his great predecessor. Ibn al-Bawwāb perfected and beautified all the six styles, especially loved by the Naskhī and the Muḥaqqiq scripts, which ideally suited his genius, and in which he is still unsurpassed. Although he is reported to have written sixty-six pages and a large number of secular works, only one of his Qur’āns and fragments of his secular works remain to the present day.

As a witness to the quality of calligraphy during the twelfth century we may especially mention just one example, the splendid Qur’ān in Muḥaqqiq which was copied in 1160 by Mas‘ūd Ibn Muḥammad al-Kutābī-al-Tafṣilānī, whose father was famous both as a man of letters and as the biographer and close friend of the great Ṣāḥih al-Ḍin (Saladin).

During the following century, calligraphy and certainly the elegant style of Thuluth, which became known as Yaqūt, and which is said to have surpassed all other styles. Yaqūt is reputed to have been a strict tutor, requiring his pupils to practise for long hours. He himself practised daily by copying two sections from the Qur’an, a routine which he apparently refused to break even when Baghdad was being sacked by the Mongol armies in 1258, for while the city was still burning, he took refuge in a minaret, pen and ink in hand, and practised writing on a piece of linen. This delightful anecdote, which may well be true, is illustrated in miniature-paintings depicting Yaqūt writing at the top of a minaret. Yaqūt lived a long life, and was by all accounts a most prolific calligrapher, but this is not reflected in the quantity of extant works by his hand. Indeed, genuine Yaqūt specimens are extremely rare and are considered among the most valuable Islamic treasures that have come down to us. Having attained these levels of perfection, the cursive scripts, particularly Thuluth, went on to evolve special ornamental forms which began to be used in Qur’āns and in secular manuscripts, and which permitted them to compete successfully with Kufic in the field of epigraphy.

The major scripts according to classical tradition

The classical tradition of Islamic calligraphy, which was established by Ibn Muqlah and lent beauty by Ibn al-Bawwāb, and which had attained its ideal in the splendid achievements of Yaqūt, now entered a period of consolidation. It is appropriate, therefore, to pause at this point to look at the major cursive scripts in more detail.

The Sitḥ (six) scripts according to classical tradition, Thuluth, Naskhī, Muḥaqqiq, Rayḥānī, Riḍī and Tawqīj, have already been introduced above. Thuluth, a static and somewhat monumental script, was mainly used for decorative purposes in manuscripts and inscriptions. An ornamental variety of Thuluth was developed by Ibn al-Bawwāb and Yaqūt, and this became so closely associated with the Qur’an and other religious texts that it rightly assumed the status of hieratic script. It was mostly used in headings, titles and colophons. Qur’āns copied entirely in Thuluth are extremely rare. A magnificent seven-volume Qur’an in the British Library is unique in being copied entirely in finest gold Thuluth.

Although it would not be wrong to concede the claim that Naskhī, as a general term, dates back to the late eighth century, the script did not appear in a more systematized form until the end of the ninth century. It was not, then, counted among the elegant scripts and was used mostly for ordinary correspondence, especially in the Arab provinces to the east of the Persian Gulf. Its ready availability enabled the Naskhī script, too, to spread throughout the Islamic East. Since the Naskhī script lacked strict conformity, it had the most to gain from Ibn Muqlah’s system. Ibn Muqlah himself formulated perfect proportions for his Naskhī characters, and from these was evolved the stylistic basis of the modern face.

The final touches were provided by the hand of Ibn al-Bawwāb, who had a marked preference for Naskhī, and transformed it into a script worthy of the Qur’an. This can be seen in the only surviving Qur’an by his hand, which was copied in Naskhī with headings in Thuluth in 1001. A Qur’an in small Naskhī, dated 1036, a mere fourteen years after the death of Ibn al-Bawwāb, illustrates its dramatic and rapid ascendency into the exclusive group of Quranic scripts. Yet another fine example of a Naskhī Qur’an, dating from the twelfth century, has letters and words exceptionally well formed and well spaced. With such fine Naskhī Qur’āns as exemplars, it is not surprising that Quranic Naskhī attained a very high standard which has been maintained to the present day, and that there are more Qur’āns copied in Naskhī than in all the other Arabic scripts together.

Muḥaqqiq was the name first given to an early script in which the letters were less angular than Kufic, with well-spaced ligatures; the whole being ‘metamorphically produced’, as its name implies. This very meticulous attention to certain details was considered at the time a sufficient mark of excellence. With the discovery of paper around 750 and its rapid spread, Muḥaqqiq also became
more widely used and less deliberately controlled. During the caliphate of al-
Ma'min (813-33) it acquired a certain roundness which made it easier to write, and it became the preferred style of the Warrāqīn (professional scribes). Modified by Ibn Muqlah when he subjected it to his Manṣūhī system, and established by him as a great script which could always be mercilessly reproduced, it continued, however, to retain its main features of extended upstrokes and almost no downstrokes or deep sublinear flourishes. Its full perfection was realized at the hands of Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. 1022), who gave it a shallow and sweeping horizontal sublinear flourishes for impetus and more extended upstrokes for grandeur. This made it, for more than four centuries, the favourite script for large Qur’āns throughout the Islamic East, and especially during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Egypt under the Mamluk sultans, and in Iraq and Persia under the Il-Khanid Mongols.  

60-63  The Rayḥānī script was said to have been derived from Nashkī, but it is evident that it also has some of the features of Thulūth, though it is much more delicate. It is mainly because of this delicacy that some sources wrongly associate its name with al-Rayḥānī (basil), a plant noted for its delicate stems. This feature is accentuated because the strokes and flourishes of its letters end in sharp points, and its diacritical marks are very fine and are always applied with a different pen with a much smaller cut. The diacriticals are often in colour. Another feature of Rayḥānī, as compared with Thulūth, is that its vertical strokes are straight and extended. Despite its derivation, Rayḥānī developed a close affinity with Muḥaqqaq, to which it may be considered a sister script. Rayḥānī, however, is usually written with a pen whose cut is about half as wide as that used for Muḥaqqaq. One of its most distinctive characteristics, which it shares with Muḥaqqaq, is that the centres of the loops of its letters are never filled in. Unlike Muḥaqqaq, however, it makes full use of sublinear flourishes, as does Thulūth, though widely-used script curves are more open than those of Thulūth. Rayḥānī, too, became a favourite script for large Qur’āns, and it was especially preferred in Persia under the Il-Khanid sultans who were contemporary with the Mamluk sultans of Egypt. Although some sources attribute this creation to Ibn al-Bawwāb because it may have been enhanced its beauty, it must rightfully be attributed to ‘Alī ibn ‘Ubaydallāh al-Rayḥānī (d. 834), from whom it derives its name. One of the most beautiful specimens of this script to reach us is a magnificent Qur’ān copied by the hand of Yaqūt.  

67 71-3  Tawqī‘ī (signature), which is also known as Tawqī‘ī, was invented in the time of the Caliph Ma‘min, and is supposed to have derived its forms from the Riṣālī script, which the Abbasid caliphs used when signing their names and titles. It has a close affinity with Thulūth, and borrowed from it certain features such as certain characters. Tawqī‘ī is more ornate script and has many characteristics with Riqa‘ī, described below. The lines in Tawqī‘ī, however, are thicker than in Riqa‘ī and its curves are less rounded, which gives it the appearance of a much heavier script. It is also a larger and much more elegant script than Riqa‘ī, and is usually reserved for important occasions. Tawqī‘ī did not develop fully until late in the eleventh century. Its establishment as a major script was brought about by Abu ‘Abdullāh ibn Mu‘ammad, called Ibn al-Khāzin (d. 1124), who was a second generation pupil of Ibn al-Bawwāb whom he admired and emulated. The same calligrapher is credited with the invention of Riqa‘ī, and was responsible for its development into a major script closely related to Tawqī‘ī, indeed regarded as its twin. During the late thirteenth century, a heavier variety of Tawqī‘ī was developed in Turkey, which was not only similar in size to Thulūth but verged even more closely on many of its characteristics. This developed Tawqī‘ī, like Thulūth, became much favoured by the Turks, but was not as popular among the Arabs as Riqa‘ī.  

74  The Riqa‘ī script, also called Ṭubqī‘ī (small short), from which it gets its name, was derived from both Nashkī and Thulūth. The geometric forms of its letters, particularly the flourishes of the final letters, resemble those of Thulūth in many respects, but it is much smaller and with more rounded curves, and its Alif is never written with barbed heads. Other characteristics are that the centres of the loops of its letters are invariably filled in, its horizontal lines are very short and its ligatures are densely structured, with the final letters of the preceding words often linked to the first letters of the following words. It was mainly used for personal correspondence and less important secular books, all of which would have been written on medium-size paper. Riqa‘ī was one of the favourite scripts of the Ottoman calligraphers, and received many improvements at the hands of the famous calligrapher Şâyki Şenâşirî al-Amâdî (d. 1520). It was progressively simplified by later calligraphers until it eventually became one of the most popular and widely-used scripts. It is extensively used today as the preferred script of handwriting throughout the Arab world. According to traditional opinion, four more cursive styles are to be regarded as major in addition to the six styles. These four are Ghūlār and Ṭūmār, introduced below, and Ta‘lîq and Naṣṭîq which will be discussed later.  

The invention of the Ghūlār (dust) script, which is also known under its full name of Ghūbār al-Ṭabī‘ī, is attributed to al-Abwāl, who apparently derived it from the Riṣālī script in the ninth century. Although it was described at an early date as a cursive script with very rounded letters and without a single straight line, a developed version of Ghūlār which survives to the present day consists of minute rounded letters with certain geometric characteristics relating it both to Thulūth and to Nashkī. It was initially devised for writing messages and brief correspondence on tiny sheets of paper to be sent by pigeon post, but was later used for various other purposes, and even for the copying of miniature Qur’āns. Many early specimens of this script have come down to us, including several miniature Qur’āns copied in rectangular, polygonal and octagonal format. The Ghūlār script has enjoyed popularity up to the present day, and we shall return to it when discussing recent calligraphic developments. The Ṭūmār script has already been described as one of the earliest Arabic scripts (p. 16). Although it still retained its large and heavy characters, by the tenth century it had lost its static and angular characteristics. Under the hands of Ibn Muqlah, Ibn al-Bawwāb and Yaqūt al-Mustâ’aṣim it acquired elegant letters with graceful curves, not unlike those of an exaggeratedly large Thulūth.  

The Maḥrūbī scripts  There has been frequent reference in earlier pages to the Islamic West and the Islamic East; it must be stressed, however, that these two general terms do not specifically refer to any political reality, nor do they reflect a definite cultural division. The terms are used here as a simplification of the very complex and composite world of Islam which is usually referred to by Muslims as Dār al-
Western Kufic did not deliberately adopt any of the calligraphic features which evolved in the Islamic East as a result of the application of Ibn Muqlah’s rules; nor did the Eastern cursive scripts themselves gain much popularity in the Islamic West; consequently, of the many Eastern cursive scripts, only Thuluth and Naskh were used to a limited extent, and even these did not gain ready acceptance, but were, rather, extensively modified until they became identifiable as Western. Moreover, since they were mostly used in Andalusia, it would be appropriate to call them Andalusian Thuluth and Andalusian Naskh. Standard Kufic continued in use for many centuries in a monumental script, and as elsewhere developed exaggeratedly decorative forms for use in epigraphy. The tendency towards a more cursive form continued, culminating in the eleventh century in a dramatic development.

This development was the establishment of a cursive script which owes little to the other cursive scripts of the East, yet surpasses many of them in the delicacy of its lines, the free flow of its open curves, its clear and rounded loops, and above all in its very deep sublinear flourishes which give it a unique quality of integration, not only between the letters and the words, but also between the lines. The slender and delicate curves and flourishes reach out and touch other letters in adjoining words. Other characteristics of the Maghribi are that its upstrokes invariably terminate with a slight curve to the left, and have relatively blunt ends, whereas its downstrokes have tapering lines, with sweeping curves also to the left which may extend into the area of the word below. Furthermore, the short upstrokes for certain letters such as ٣ and ٣ are always written inclined towards the right.

Khalif’s system of diacritical marks was used in Maghribi, with some rare exceptions, from the very beginning, but some elements of Abū l-Aswad’s system, such as the use of coloured dots to indicate Hamzas and Muddath, were retained and continued to be used simultaneously with the system of Khalif. Ijārij’s system of letter-pointing was also used with Maghribi, except that the Arabic letters for ٣ and ٣ are written ٣ and ٣ in the East, but are usually written ٣ and ٣ in Maghribi. The lightness and grace of the Maghribi script were often effectively contrasted with the massive ornamental Kufic which was chosen for headings. The size of the script relative to the page, and its density, were left to the discretion of the calligrapher and the need of the occasion. The difference in a single script may range, given the same size of page, from two or three monumental written words per line to a densely copied line consisting of twelve words or more. It is in keeping with Western conservatism that whereas in the East paper became the normal writing material after the eighth century, paper continued to be used in the Maghribi until the end of the fourteenth century. The oblong format was also retained for a longer time, indeed was still used as late as the eighteenth century.

Although Maghribi was first formulated at Kairouan, it soon spread to become the most widely-used script throughout North-West Africa and Muslim Spain. This inevitably exposed the standard early Maghribi script to local influences which eventually produced slightly variant regional styles. It must be stressed, however, that Maghribi retained most of its characteristics and permitted only minor modifications. The simple act of copying acknowledged masters, rather than applying a laid-down system of calligraphic rules which yet allowed some individual discretion in inessentials, also helped to stabilize the Maghribi script, and induced the calligraphers to maintain a conformity within the family of Maghribi scripts.

Despite this conformity it is possible to distinguish four styles. Quraywânî, Andalusi, Fâsi and Sûdâni. Quraywânî was certainly the earliest to develop and the first to give way to another script, in this case the Fâsi. It was usually written on medium-size parchments which were often oblong in shape. It generally shows a hint of resemblance to Naskh, and has very short upstrokes. When
copying the Qur'an, its monumental variety is used, which is relatively heavier, fully vocalized and meticulously executed. In secular works, however, only very essential vocalization is used, and the letters are not only smaller, but also depart from regular forms.

Andalusia is easier to recognize because it is more compact than the other styles and has smaller letters. Its lines are very fine and is generally more delicate than its sister scripts. It is not usually found semi-vocalized, and when fully vocalized it follows the system of Khalif, but at the same time it employs coloured dots for the Hamshah and Naddeh according to Abu J.-I-Awas's system. Although this style has its origins in Qurtubah (Cordoba), the most illustrious city of al-Andalus (Andalusia) – hence it is also known as Qurtubi – it quickly established itself as the regional style for the whole of Muslim Spain. It also crossed the Straits and spread to Morocco, and subsequently established close affinity with Fasi. The eventual loss by Islam of all its domains in the Iberian Peninsula, however, resulted in the forcible deportation of nearly all Muslims on Spanish soil, with them the Andalusian script and its calligraphers were also ousted and found refuge in Morocco. This naturally resulted in the amalgamation of Andalusian and Fasi into one script.

Fasi was larger and less compact than Andalusian, and had deeper flourishes, and it transmitted these characteristics to Andalusia when the two were amalgamated. The resulting script was simply called Maghribli. An ornamental variety of this Maghribli soon developed, and was usually written or engraved in monumental size with long upstrokes each extending to the same height, the whole creating a solid rectangular panel which was usually filled with arabesque and floral designs.

Sidani was first developed in Timbuctu, which was founded in 1213 and became the most important Islamic centre in the sub-Saharan region of North-West Africa. Sidani, which takes its name from the Arabic term Bidia al-Sidini (lands of black Africans), spread throughout the Islamic belt from Mauritania to the Sudan. It became the preferred script amongst the Hausas, the Fulanis and other Muslim peoples who inhabit these sub-Saharan regions, which extend as far south as northern Nigeria. Although he was notorious throughout the world as a great destroyer, he became in his later years, after having been fully converted to Islam, a great patron of all aspects of Islamic art. He often gathered the best artisans, scholars, artists and calligraphers in the territories he conquered, and carried them off to his capital, Samarkand.

Timur paid special attention to the art of calligraphy, and was directly responsible for the creation of a new style of Qur'an illumination which was called after him, and which replaced the earlier Mongol style of the Il-Khanids. In contrast to the Il-Khanid style, which aimed to achieve grandeur with large Qur'ans copied in monumental script with bold and geometrically structured illumination, the Timurid style aimed to create a balance between beauty and grandeur by combining a clearly written script in large Qur'ans with extremely fine, intricate, softly coloured illumination of floral patterns, integrated with ornamental Eastern Kufic so fine as to be almost invisible. Of the larger scripts used, Rayhani was consistently preferred, and its delicacy was emphasized by writing its vowels with an even finer pen than usual. Naskhi was used to a lesser extent, but given a greater clarity and purity of line which later influenced the scripts of Persian Ta'iqi and Indian Naskhi.

The qualities and characteristics of the Timurid period were most especially reflected in their large Qur'ans, some of which are among the largest ever produced. A delightful example is the famous manuscript, which tells of Timur's love of large Qur'ans is the story of 'Umar Ashr', whom Timur commissioned to write a Qur'an. 'Umar at length presented Timur with a Qur'an copied in Ghubar script, so tiny as to
The early Islamic calligraphers were particularly active in Egypt and Syria during the early centuries of Islam. The earliest surviving examples of Arabic calligraphy come from Egypt, where the style known as 'Kufic' was widely used. This style was characterized by its square, angular shapes and was used to transcribe the Quran, which was written on papyrus and parchment.

Another important center of Islamic calligraphy was in Persia, where the style known as 'Nasir-i Jahan' was developed. This style was characterized by its flowing, ornate script and was used to transcribe the Quran, which was written on paper and silk.

The calligraphers of the Islamic world were highly respected and were often employed by the caliphs and sultans to transcribe the Quran and other important texts. They were also known for their skill in creating beautiful illuminated manuscripts, which were often used as gifts or for decoration.

The importance of calligraphy in Islamic art continued throughout the centuries, with new styles and techniques being developed. The works of the calligraphers of the Islamic world have had a lasting influence on the development of Islamic art and culture.
There are certain features common to Ta’iq, Nasta’iq, and Riq’a. Among these are the relative lack of pointed elevations, Amūn (teeth), in the horizontal lines of certain letters such as s and sh, frequent filling in of the centres of the loops of most of the letters, and the ending of most of the unjoined letters on very thin and pointed lines. Another common feature is that the curves display marked contrast in their line-width, which changes abruptly from the thinnest possible line that can be drawn by the same pen.

During Shah Tahmasp’s reign (1524-76). Nasta’iq replaced Naskh and became the natural script to use for copying Persian anthologies, epics and other literary works. Ever since the reign of the great Shah ‘Abbās (1588-1629) it has been used in most of the Persian illuminated secular manuscripts, especially those with miniatures. Although it was used to a lesser extent by other Muslim peoples, it had a considerable influence upon the development of their calligraphic art in general, and on Naskhī in particular. Both Arab and Turkish calligraphers in the Ottoman Empire developed a new hybrid style of small Naskhī verging on Ta’iq which may simply be called Ottoman Naskhī, and which was frequently used for writing and copying the prolific literary output of the period.

Ta’iq and Nasta’iq were seldom used for copying the Qur’ān, and so far as is known, there is only one complete extant Qur’ān in Nasta’iq. This superb copy, made for Shah Tahmasp by Shāh Māhmūd al-Nishābūrī in 1539, testifies to the ultimate clarity, strength and beauty that Nasta’iq can attain.

As if to compensate for the exclusion of Nasta’iq from the prestigious group of Quranic scripts, the Safavid sultans strove to set their mark upon the art of Quranic calligraphy and illumination. The Qur’āns of this period had the special feature of pages divided into two or more compartments containing scripts of markedly different sizes. Often these compartments would number as many as seven, with vertical ones being used asilluminative devices to enhance the already rich illumination.

Mir ‘Alī al-Tābrīzī was followed by a long and impressive line of Muslim calligraphers, mainly by the Persians, who have left us a rich scatter of Quranic calligraphic specimens. Among the early masters of this script who deserve a special mention are ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Khawārizmī, a fifteenth-century pioneer who reached a very high level of competence. He was followed and emulated by his sons, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Anzārī and ‘Abd al-Karīm Fīdhāshī.

The reign of the great Shah ‘Abbās which saw Persian culture reach new heights was also the golden age for Nasta’iq. It produced a large number of master calligraphers, the most famous of whom were Qāsim Shāhī, Shāh Kābir ibn Uways al-Ardalbī, Khuṭbūšī, Ghulām al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, the last and probably the greatest of this generation of Persian calligraphers was ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī. The prestige enjoyed by these master calligraphers may be illustrated by an historical anecdote concerning ‘Imād al-Dīn, whose social standing was so high that he dared disdain the royal patronage of Shah ‘Abbās, and refused to comply with his request to produce for him a copy of the Persian epic, the Shāhnāma of Firdawsī. The Shah having sent him a small sum of money with his order as an advance payment in 1615, enquired for the book after a lapse of almost a year, whereupon ‘Imād al-Dīn responded by sending him only a few lines from the first page of the book, which he deemed to be all that the Shah was entitled to in respect of his initial payment. This so angered Shah ‘Abbās that he never forgave ‘Imād al-Dīn, and soon afterwards engineered his death.

Arabic calligraphy developed in India and Afghanistan along much more traditional lines. A minor cursive script called Behārī appeared in India during the fourteenth century, the main characteristics of which are its wide, heavy and extended horizontal lines, which contrast markedly with its thin and delicate verticals. Its letters are well spaced and its flourishes are open-curved and very pronounced, and it was often written in multiple colours, mainly black with gold, red and blue. Despite its evident cursiveness, this script has affinities with a more angular script which was developed at Herat in the early fourteenth century as a clumsy revival of standard Kufic, and we may call it Herati-Kufic. This script, which was used in Afghanistan, no doubt also influenced the development of the Ottoman Siqāṣ script which is described below.

The many millions of Chinese Muslims who used the Arabic script, at least for liturgical purposes, usually adopted the calligraphic styles which were current in Afghanistan, with slight modifications. In addition to these, they evolved a special script called Sīni (Chinese) with very fine lines and exaggerated roundness, which they used mostly on their ceramic and chinaware. A purely ornamental style was derived from Sīni, which retained its roundness, but was easily distinguished by its very thick and almost triangular verticals and its comparatively thin horizontal lines.

On the whole, Muslim calligraphers in both India and Afghanistan were directly influenced by Persian calligraphers. Indian Muslims adopted Nasta’iq as a national script and applied it considerably to Urdu, but in Afghanistan and certain parts of the Indian subcontinent, a slightly developed Naskhī continued in use. The main characteristics of this script, which we may term Indian Naskhī, are its heavier, bolder and more widely-spaced letters. Its curves are also more perfectly round, which gives it a solidity that is lacking in ordinary Naskhī. Thuluth developed along the same lines, and is therefore called Indian Thuluth. These developments were fully consolidated under the Moghul dynasty (1526-1857) which ruled in India and Afghanistan. Calligraphy was especially favoured by the Moghul emperors Bābur (d. 1530), Akbar (1556-1605) and Jahāngīr (1605-28). The last named so keenly admired and sought after the calligraphy of ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī, that he promptly rewarded with a high rank anyone who presented him with a specimen by the hand of this great Persian calligrapher.

The Ottoman dynasty, which takes its name from its founder ‘Uthmān, dates back to the early fourteenth century, but the Ottomans’ empire was not fully established until they had defeated the Mamluks in 1517, and inherited their domains in Syria, Egypt and Arabia. Soon afterwards, they were able to incorporate almost the whole of the Arab world into their empire. This closed the glorious chapter of Mamluk calligraphy and opened a new and perhaps a final chapter in the long history of Islamic calligraphy. From then on, much less is known about the art of calligraphy, and even now, very recently, there is no clear evidence of other arts of Islam became associated with the Ottoman Turks. This also applied to the art of calligraphy, which the Ottomans quickly assimilated and proceeded to develop with great devotion and enthusiasm. They became renowned for their love of calligraphy, and not only did they meet the constant demands of their arch-enemies in Persia prevented them from admiring their calligraphic traditions and applying Ta’iq to their own language. This close association extended to the arts of calligraphy, book illumination and binding to such an extent that it becomes on occasions very difficult to tell with certainty whether a given manuscript was produced in Turkey or in Persia.

Not only did the Ottomans accept most of the current calligraphic scripts and excel in them, but they also developed some new and purely indigenous styles. They esteemed Arabic calligraphy highly, and felt its sacredness very intensely. This is reflected in the exceptionally large number of illuminated Qur’āns which were produced, in the prolific use of ornamental scripts in mosques, schools and public buildings, and in the thousands of calligraphic manuscripts of secular works which are still extant in Turkey and elsewhere.

The greatest contribution to Islamic calligraphy was that of Shaykh Hamdullah al-Amārī (d. 1630), who is considered the greatest master of the whole Ottoman period. He taught calligraphy to the Ottoman sultan Bāyarīd II
Guźārī is the technique of filling the area within the outlines of relatively large letters with various ornamental devices, including floral designs, geometric patterns, hunting scenes, portraits, small script and other motifs. It is often used in composite calligraphy, where it is also surrounded by other decorative units and calligraphic panels.

Muḥāfāz or Ayānī is the art of mirror writing, in which the unit on the left reflects the unit on the right. This technique is also known as Ma’īzā (reflected).

Zoomorphic calligraphy, which dates back to the fifteenth century, acquired a new appeal more recently. Mostly Thuluth, Naṣīḥah, Ta’līq or Nasta’līq are used in this way, and are extensively modified and manipulated to build up forms resembling animals, birds, etc. The tops of certain vertical letters were sometimes modified to form the outlines of a human figure, an anthropomorphosis which is frowned upon by some Muslims.

The Tughra, a calligraphic device which became especially famous as the emblem of the Ottoman sultans, developed in the hands of successive generations of calligraphers to reach heights of elegant and elaborate ornamentation. A more modern development is al-Kuruy al-Sunub, a heavy and highly stylized script that was probably derived mainly from the Dīvānī script. Although it is distinctive and fairly attractive, it is not widely used today.

Another modern script which is in the same category as Sunbali is Ḥurf al-Nūr, which has the added characteristic, as its name suggests, of resembling tongues of flame.

Siyārat is a functional script developed by the Ottomans for use in Government offices, particularly those which issue licences and similar documents in connection with commercial or financial affairs. It is characterized by its straight and heavy lines and its relative angularity, which relate to Herati-Kufic script that was used in Afghanistan and in certain parts of India.

Ḥurf al-Tij (crown letters) is probably the most modern script of all. It was developed in Egypt in 1930 by Muḥammad Maḥfīz for King Fu’ad I, who wanted to introduce into Arabic the use of capital letters. So far, however, this has not yet met with significant success, and Arabic continues to be written without capitals.

Today, the special honour paid to calligraphers by all Muslims throughout their history continues, and is reflected in the esteem and rewards conferred on the few outstanding contemporary calligraphers.

The first revelation of the Qur’ān deals with the art of writing, a gift which God bestowed on man (Qur’ān, XXVI: "He has taught the use of the pen. He has taught man which that he knew not."). The second Quranic revelation is entitled al-Qāsim "The Pen" (Qur’ān, LXVII: "By the Pen and by what it writes"). One of the many sayings on calligraphy which are attributed to the Prophet Muhammad is "Good writing makes the truth stand out." It is not surprising, therefore, that calligraphy has been patronized and encouraged at the highest level throughout its history, becoming one of the most important visible factors that relates the Muslims to each other, and manifesting itself in all branches of Islamic art, as the illustrations which follow show.

The Qur’ān, which is the word of God and touches every aspect of Muslim life, has always been an object of devotion and the focus for the artistic genius of Islam. This not only elevated calligraphy to the level of a sacramental art, but made the many hundreds of exquisite Qur’ān copies which were produced the best documentary evidence of the art itself. Accordingly, Qur’ān pages are most numerous among the illustrations which follow. At the same time, the full richness and complexity of the art of calligraphy is only to be appreciated through a study of the profusion of inscriptions on brick, stone, brass, tile, pottery, wood and other materials, and in addition, of the important non-Quranic scripts and styles which have evolved at various times at the hands of inspired calligraphers.
The Basmalah – 'In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful'

The invocation Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim – 'In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful' – known as the Basmalah, is used before chapter openings throughout the Qur'an (1:1). Two of the examples are in Kufic script: Western Kufic from the 10th century (top) and Eastern Kufic from the 11th century (centre); the third example (below) is in a classic cursive script, Rayhali, with Surah (chapter) headings in ornamental Eastern Kufic and dates from the late 13th century.
4 Mashq Basmalah from a Qur'an copied c. 700–750, probably in Medina

5 (below) Ornamental Kufic Basmalah, incised on marble, from an Egyptian tombstone dated 966/7

The words of the Basmalah — 'Bismillah al-Rahmān al-Rahīm — appear in various calligraphic styles — written, incised, carved, beaded or moulded — in each of the introductory plates (1–13). The wide variety of shapes taken by these identical words reveals the unique flexibility of which the Arabic script is capable.

6 The first three words of the Basmalah in typical Patina Kufic, carved in marble, from a 16th-century Egyptian tombstone

7 (above) Kufic Basmalah from a 17th-century Turkish ornamental calligraphic page (see also 150)
8 Pollated Kufic Basmalah on a wooden tomb-cover. Baghdad 1227

9 Contracted form of the Basmalah, known as the Tammjah, reading Rūm Allāh – "In the name of God" – in Kufic on an open-metalwork mosque lamp. Egypt, early 11th century

10 (opposite) Thuluth Basmalah in the metalwork grill of a door, commissioned by Shih Sulaymān I and dated 1693. The inscription is from the Qurʾān, Sūrat al-Naml, "The Ant" (XVII, 30), which contains the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. It translates: "It is from Solomon and it is in the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful". This verse is the only occurrence of the Basmalah in the actual text of the Qurʾān.