Arabic Inscriptions in Egypt

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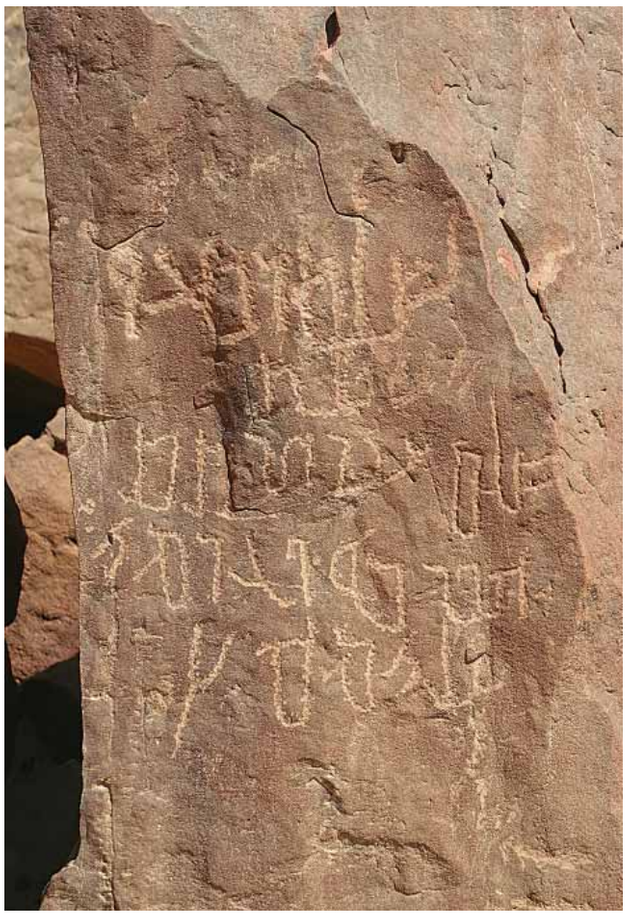
Calligraphy should be characterized by three main features, the most important of which is its readability, followed by the ease with which it is written and finally, its appeal to the eye.

The importance of Calligraphy in Islam stems from the fact that it is the art that has maintained, through the ages and up till today, the highest levels of elegance and artistry. Arabic calligraphy goes back to Nabatean writing. The Nabateans are several tribes of Arabic origin that migrated northwards from the Hejaz deserts to the Median region and settled in Petra where they dug wells, and that is how they got their name (Al Anbaat– those who get water by digging wells). The motive behind moving to this area was their desire to control the vital economic artery in the western part of the Arab peninsula called the 'Great Trade Route', or 'the Gold and Incense Road'.

Petra,[1] the Nabatean capital had an important and strategic location that enabled anyone who took hold of it, to control this precious trade. The excavations in the city uncovered dwellings and citadels as well as Nabatean graves engraved in rocks with their facades standing up till today and mostly in good condition. The Nabateans used the wealth that flowed into their hands through their control over the Great Trade Route and their transactions with the Levant markets to create a powerful state during the first and second centuries BCE, and the first century CE; a state that extended from Madaen Saleh south to Damascus north, making Madaen Saleh the second capital after Petra.[2]

During this time, the language of commercial transactions in the Levant markets (with the power of the Nabateans prevailing) was the Aramic language and the Aramic script which they developed into Nabatean script. It seems that the Nabatean's use of this foreign language made them more open to the surrounding cultures and civilizations. They were influenced by the Greek, Roman, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian civilizations. However, the influence of the Greek and Roman civilizations was deeper and more comprehensive than all the others. Their Arab origins, nevertheless, gained ground and the Nabatean language soon included more and more Arabic words and alterations. Their own language, widely known to researchers as 'the Nabatean



(Fig. 1) Nabataean inscription,Wadi Mukattab.

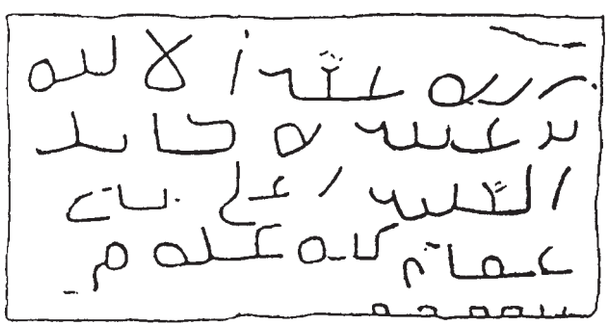
language', was thus created out of a mixture of Aramic and Arabic.

Several theories emerged with regards to the derivation of the Arabic Calligraphy. Some say it was originally derived from Musnad writing, or Himyarite, or Syriac scripts. However, according to Dr. Abdel-Moneim Sayed, the most accurate claim is that it originated from the Nabatean writing and he has three pieces of evidence to support that;[3]

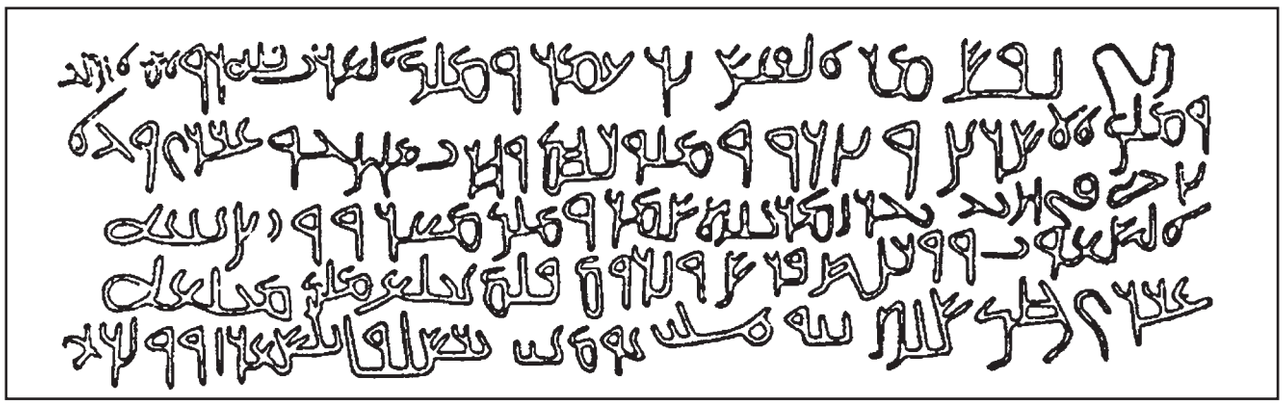
1. The clear similarity between Nabatean writing and early Arabic inscription;
2. The presence of 'Ligature' which distinguish Arabic calligraphy, in late Nabatean writings. (Fig. 1)
3. The absence of dotting in both Nabatean and early Arabic script.
4. The order of characters in the Arabic alphabet is identical to that in the Nabatean alphabet, and it is known as the 'Abjadi' order.

Where Arabic calligraphy originated is still a subject of dispute among scholars. Some claim that it first came into being in the Levant and the evidence is the Nabatean discovered inscriptions that show Arabic characteristics in their calligraphy and their language. The oldest of them is the early Um-Ul-Jamal inscription (c. CE 250) (Fig. 2), followed by the al-Namarah inscription (328 CE) (Fig. 3). This claim is based on the fact that Siniatic Nabatean Calligraphy provides the connection between Nabatean writing in the Levant, and the Arabic script.

Other scholars, however, believe that the Arabic script originated in the Hejaz, as Nabatean inscriptions were found contemporaneous with the Levant inscriptions; the CE 267 Madaen Saleh



(Fig. 2) Umm al Jamal inscription.

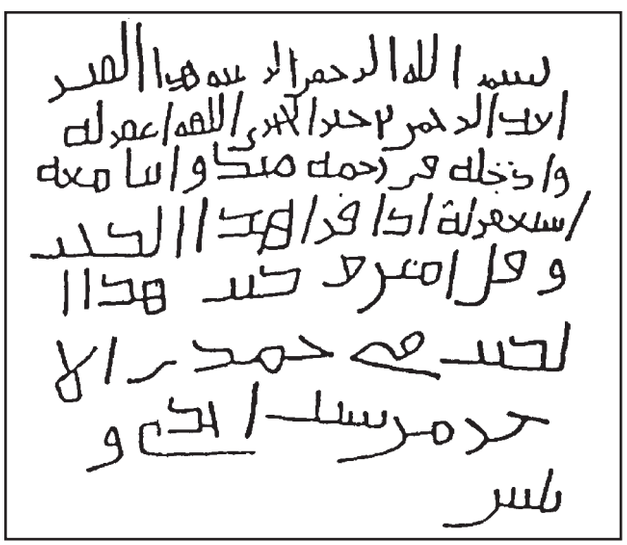


(Fig. 3) Namara inscription.

inscriptions and the Al-Ola inscription (CE 307). This advanced script moved to Mecca and Yathrib when the early Arabic script first appeared. Hence, the Muslim Arabs transported this inscription to Hira with the conquest of Iraq, and the establishment of Kufa in 17 AH/ 638 CE. The Kufa scribes developed and improved it and used it to write 'Mushafs' (the Holy Quran). The script thus acquired the name 'Kufi'.[4]

On the other hand, we find that the Arabs left a set of inscriptions behind, during their travels to Egypt, or during their stay there. The set comprises of thirteen scriptures that vary in their calligraphy, and dialects. Some of them were found on the trade routes leading to the Egyptian urban centers of the time. Other inscriptions (those of Ma'in, Hadhramaut, Thamud, and Lehyan) were discovered during other excavations in Egypt.[5]

Since the beginning of Islamic history Muslims have used two types of scripts representing the two main styles in Arabic calligraphy; the dry writing, known as 'Kufi' with its straight lines and acute and right angles, and the Cursive style with its curved and round characters. Each inscription witnessed numerous stages of development and creativity. However, the dry or Kufi writing was considered the main Islamic Writing style due to its popularity at the onset of Islamic civilization, especially in formal correspondences, mushafs (copies of the Quran), gravestones, foundational texts, and artifacts. One of the oldest texts written in this style is on the gravestone of Abdel-Rahman



(Fig. 4) Abdul Rahman ibn Khayr's burial plaque, first century of Hijra, written in Primitive Kufi, found at the tombs in Aswan.

Ben Kheir El-Hagari, (31 AH/ 652 CE) (fig. 4). The inscription on this gravestone represents the Kufi calligraphy in its beginnings (Primitive Kufi). One of its most prominent features is the lack of accuracy in drawing the letters to the extent that makes one assume that this is the first stage in the development of Arabic calligraphy, as it lacks the features of proper Arabic writing like the disproportionate spaces between its lines, that show that the rules of writing had not been completed yet. Also, the second oldest inscription (35 AH/ 656 CE) (Fig. 5) is found in Mt Naqus in Tur, South Sinai, Egypt. The Kufi writing, afterwards, started to gradually move towards elegance, and ornamentation without any additions or adornments added to the letters themselves. However, the symmetry between letters and words, and the straight lines and limited number of words in each line in proportion to the length or width of the line itself, means that the scribe set a geometrical writing plan for himself before he began writing. This type of writing is known as Simple or plain Kufi. One of its clearest examples is the Nilometer Foundational text at the Roda island in Cairo (247 AH/ 861 CE) (Fig. 6). It is considered the oldest foundational text in Islamic Architecture in Egypt, as well as the foundational text on the Mosque of Ahmed ibn-Touloun (265 AH/ 871 CE) (Fig. 7).

(Fig. 5) Arabic Inscription from Jabal Naqus, south Sinai.

(Fig. 6) Nilometer foundation text at the Rawda Island in Cairo, (247H/861 CE), considered to be the oldest foundation text on Islamic architecture.

(Fig. 7) The foundation text of Ahmed Ibn Toulon Mosque (263-265 H/876-879 CE). Also known for its beautiful Kufic inscriptions.

The Kufi inscription continues to evolve, and a new style appears; *the Kufi with Elaborate Apices.* This style started to deviate from traditional Kufi with which the mushafs were written during the first Hijra centuries, to take an ornate shape in which the apices have slanted edges like pen nibs. Ornamentation increased on the apices especially on buildings and artifacts. Mushafs however, retained their writing style, and the new style was known as 'Simple Kufi with Elaborate Apices'. The apices took the shapes of anchors. This characteristic was also found in late Nabatean and Siniatic calligraphy, and it appeared on several gravestones such as a gravestone dated 191 AH/ 807 CE, and another dated 196 AH/ 812 CE.

Kufi calligraphy continues to develop and the *Floriated Kufi* in which the apices take the shape of a half palmette appeared. Plant leaves came sometimes out of the letter apices and at other times from the frame surrounding the text. They took the shape of half palmettes or three lobed leaves. One notices that the plant elements were directly attached to the letters, and after the vertical letters were decorated with the above mentioned shapes, some short letters like the 'Ba'a' (ب) and other letters of the same height started receiving their share of embellishment. Some letters were also drawn in the shape of plants, such as the 'ain' (ع), and 'ghain' (غ) that were drawn like lotus flowers or three lobed leaves, and the 'meem' (م) took the shape of a flower. The most impressive and most suitable in shape to foliated Kufi was

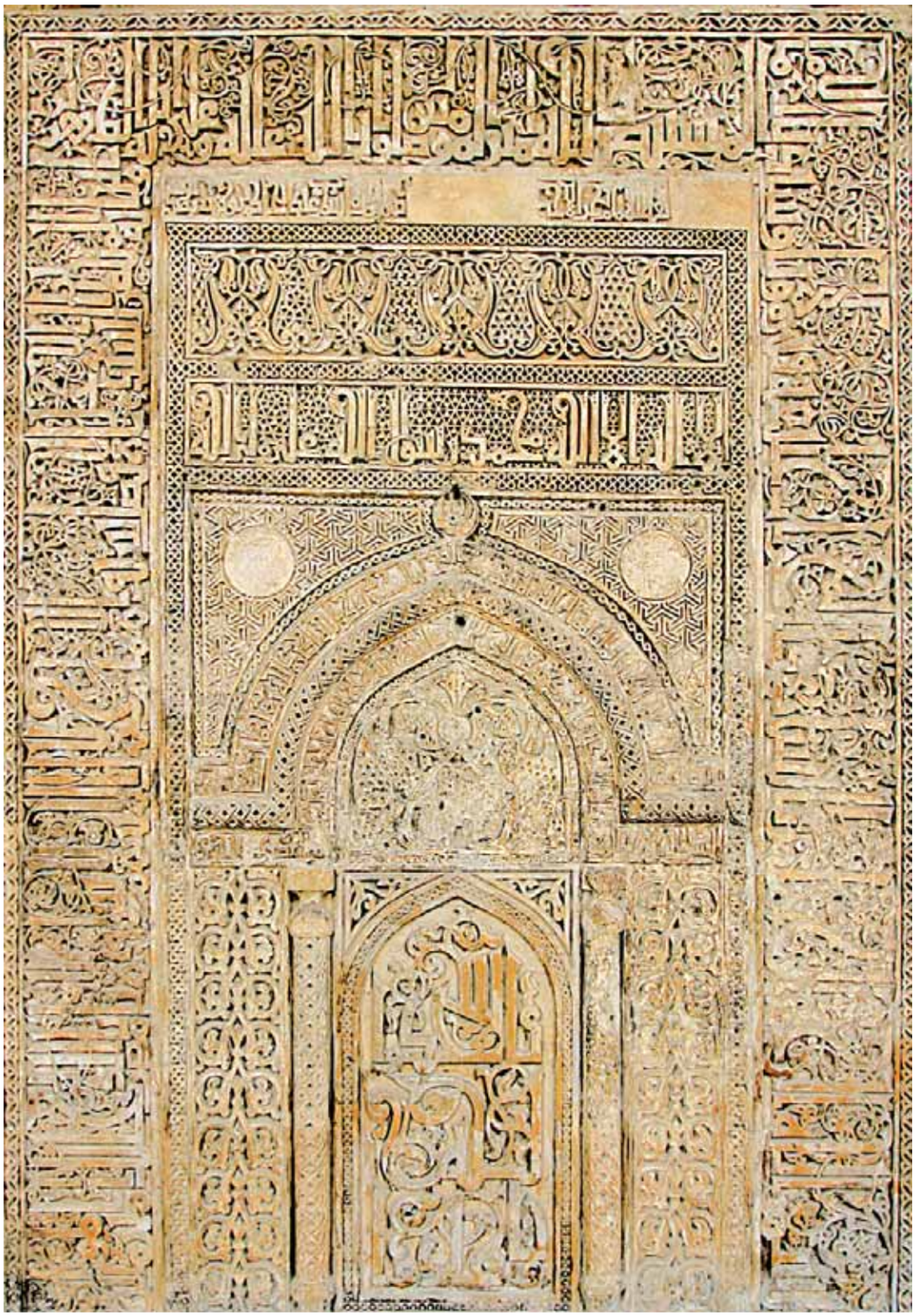
(Fig. 8) Al-Azhar's architecture denotes the manifestation of the Floriated Kufic calligraphy.

the 'lam alef' character (ﻵ), the apices of which became leaves and the base turned into three-lobed-leaves. These shapes are clear on a number of gravestones (3rd c. AH/ 9th c. CE) preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo.

The Kufi script developed further into *the Floriated Kufi* stage, and after the plant leaf was inseparable from the letter, letters themselves became long plant stems and leaves came out of them. This style is demonstrated in the writings and engravings found on the walls of Al-Azhar Mosque (359-361 AH) (Fig. 8).

The magnificence of the Kufi script with the foliated background attracted the attention of art historians. The inscription, in this style, is written over a background of repeated patterns of wavy plant stems with leaves of various shapes. This script is different from the floriated one because the plant decoration in the latter style comes out of the letters, *i.e.* it is part of the letter itself, whereas, in *the Kufi script with the foliated background*, the inscription is totally separated from the foliated background. Yet, the foliated ornamentation still adds a kind of elegance and flexibility to the rigid Kufi letters, achieving a balance between suppleness and rigidity. Many examples of this calligraphy were produced in the Fatimid period, as demonstrated in the Iwan of Sultan Al Nasser Hassan's Madrasa in Cairo (757 AH/ 1356 CE) (Fig. 9). Kufi writings with geometrical backgrounds also appeared in that period. One is the Islamic testament 'La illaha illa Allah'; 'I testify that there is none worthy of worship except Allah', seen on the narrow strip of Kufi writing in Al-Afdal Shahenshah's prayer niche at Ahmed ibn-Touloun's Mosque in Cairo (Fig. 10).

(Fig. 9) Sultan Hassan's Mamluk School in Cairo, an architectural gem that goes back to 727H/1356-1362 CE.



(Fig. 10) Kufic writing in Al-Afdal Shahensha's prayer niche at Ahmed Ibn Toulon's Mosque in Cairo.

The interlaced or plaited form is considered to be one of the most interesting scripts that appeared in Egypt. In this style, the vertical parts of the letters are drawn in the form of a braid or as intertwined branches with several little knots between their curves along with many shapes of plaited elements. The braiding is not restrained to the verticals of the same word; more than not, verticals of more than one word intertwine, and the plaited shapes are repeated along the writing to form a strip of elaborate interlaced branches. This style was most probably created in Iran in the 3rd c. AH/ 9th c. CE. One of its most wonderful lasting examples in Egypt is part of the Quranic verse, 'Al Kursi', engraved on the inside of the dome of Imam Al Shafei Mosque (608 AH/ 1211 CE), and the Al-Sayeda Roqaya Prayer niche (527 AH/ 1133 CE) (Fig. 11). This kind of script leads us to another style which is the *Kufi with Decorative Border* where the apices of vertical letters are extended to reach the upper decorative border then break once they reach the border and take the shape of a straight decorative line parallel to it. Once the apices meet, ends intertwine in a braid, thus a second parallel border is formed to frame the writing. At times, intertwined leaves formed the decorative border; at others, the crowns of the letters were just plaited together to create the same effect. The Kufi script also acquired some of its shapes from architecture, and what was known as the Kufi with Architectural Decoration appeared. It is characterized by its letter crowns embellished with intertwining decorations shaped as ropes, or chains of circled and pointed rings. This type started with drawing small brackets between the letters, and ended by extending their vertical apices to form multi-shaped architectural forms. The scribe in this style arranges the shapes symmetrically so that the right and the left parts are equal in their architectural form.

This phenomenon first started with the Name of God 'Allah', due to the sacredness of the word

(Fig. 11) Al-Sayeda Rukaya's prayer niche.

and what it represents in Islamic belief. fascinated by the Holy Name, artists decorated it with architectural shapes, especially chains that have religious meaning, and represent the open door in the name of God which may suggest that the door to God is open for His worshippers.

Examples of this type of Kufi calligraphy first appeared on gravestones. Ornamentation was seen between the two Ls (ل) in 'Allah' in an Egyptian gravestone (191 AH/ 1806 CE), and then another gravestone dating back to 201 AH/ 1816 CE. This form developed to take the shape of a three foiled arch, on a gravestone in 199 AH/ 1814 CE.

Another Kufi Script appeared; *the Kufi with Geometrical Forms*. It is characterized by its right angled letters and extremely straight and defined lines, which give it the appearance of an organized geometrical design as well being highly ornate. Its letters are closely intertwined and compressed within a defined space in a geometric frame making them at times indecipherable. Nevertheless, Rectangular Kufi proved its calligraphers' artistic abilities to innovate, design and execute their unique art. Oblong geometrical Kufi inscriptions were also drawn within rectangular shaped borders, as demonstrated on the front of the wooden pulpit at Abou el-Ela Mosque in Bulaq, Cairo (890 AH/ 1485 CE) (Fig. 12). Another form of the Kufi with Geometrical Forms is the Square Geometric Kufi Inscriptions which is Kufi right angular script compressed in an organized way within a square shape or area. Another examples are the Triangle Geometrical Kufi in which Kufi angular writing is placed within a triangle. There is also the Pentagon Geometrical Kufi Inscriptions

(Fig. 12) Geometrical Kufic inscriptions on the front of the pulpit at Abu el-Ella's Mosque in Cairo.

with the script placed inside a pentagon. We shall, however, pause at the Octagonal Geometric Kufi Inscription which is angular Kufi writing inside an octagon. The most magnificent of this inscription is a plank of octagon-shaped marble that dates back to the Mamluk era in the 8th c. AH/14th c. CE and is kept in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. The marble plank has Octagonal Geometric Kufi Inscriptions in which words interlace in a magnificent geometric design creating the name of God, the name of the Prophet Muhammad, and the names of the ten of his companions, who were promised paradise. The letters are characterized by being vertical, and by intertwining in complete harmony and symmetry.

The geometric Kufi types mentioned previously are known as 'square/ rectangular Kufi' and, 'Kufi-Quadrangular' in English; and 'le Kufique carré', and 'Écriture kufique quadrangulaire' in French. Examples of this script appeared in the Fatimide era, such as the design of the word 'Muhammad' at the top of the Giushi Mosque dome (478 AH/ 1085 CE). It was widespread in the Mamluk buildings, when artists noticed the script's variety of vertical and horizontal shapes, that could be used in ornamentation. They used it and created unsurpassed works.

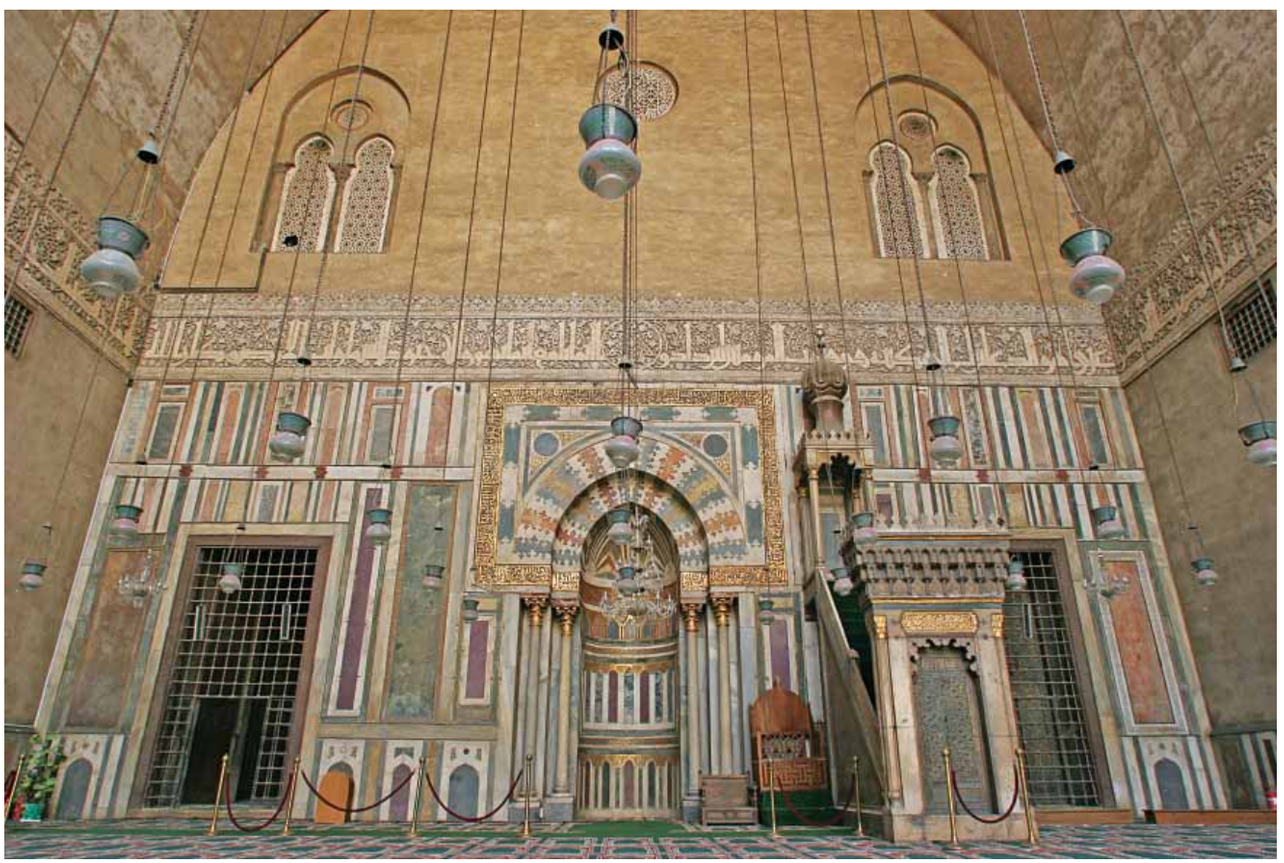
The mausoleum of Sultan Qalawoun (683-684 AH/ 1284-1285 CE) is considered the oldest surviving architectural example of using square Kufi inscriptions for the ornamentation of Mamluk buildings in Egypt. It comprises eight marble planks placed vertically and horizontally in the heart of the Mausoleum. Each of the four walls has two planks on each side. The planks are divided into two groups; the first group consists of four large rectangular planks, each of which has three square units, with repeated ornamented inscription. Each of the square units in the eight planks is decorated with square geometrical inscriptions, symmetrical in shape and content, as the word 'Muhammad' is inscribed in an organized ornamented manner and repeated four times inside every square unit. The word 'Muhammad' was written in each of the four lines, in a way by which the base of the word is aligned with each side of the square unit. They are also aligned so that the apices of the first letter of the word meet in the center of the square unit. (Fig. 13), Another

(Fig. 13) granite piers of Qalawoun Mausoleum.

masterpiece of this inscription, is the writing on the madrasa of Sultan Hassan (757-64 AH/ 1356-63 CE) (Fig.14) and in the ceramic plaque signed by Ghaibi Al-Tawrizi (Fig. 15).

Thuluth calligraphy started overtaking Kufi as the official documenting script by the 6th c. AH/ 12th c. CE although the latter, as clear in previous examples, retained its place as the script used for writing and ornamenting Quranic verses and Mushafs, as well as some artifacts, combined with the Thuluth at times, and was also used as a decorative element in buildings.

(Fig. 15) An ornamented ceramic plaque bearing the signature of the renowned Mamluk craftsman, Ghaybi Ibn al-Tawreezi, in square Kufic calligraphy.

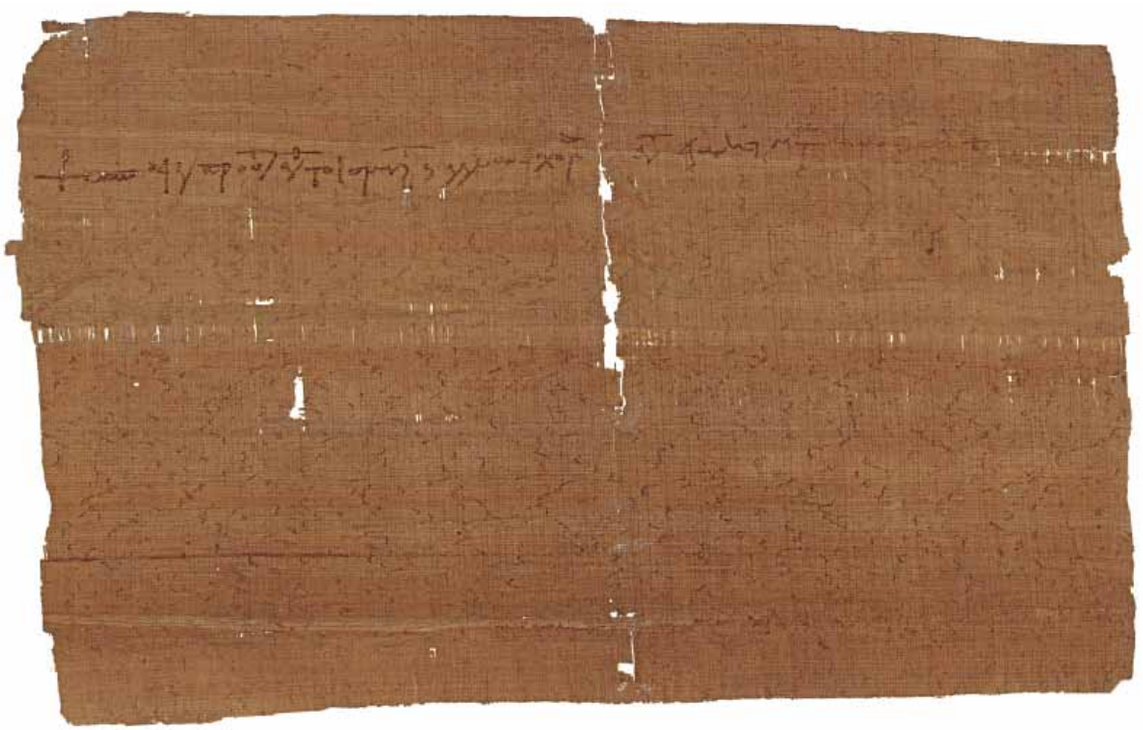


(Fig. 14) The grand Iwan in Sultan Hassan's madrasa.

Cursive script

With their arrival in Egypt, Muslim armies brought cursive fonts, also known as 'El-Mashaq' and 'Simplified writing'. Its round shapes facilitated its use in quick daily matters. Its best examples are the early Arabic Papyri.

During the early centuries of Hijra, especially the first, the cursive script was simple in its level of artistry, and its letter shapes. It is noticed that sometimes phrases were linked together or shortened in an incredible manner. The Ihnassya Papyrus (22 AH/ 642 CE) is believed to be the oldest known Arabic Egyptian document today. This papyrus reveals the good relationship between the Arab conquerors and the Coptic Egyptians living in Egypt at the time of the Islamic expansion into the country, and it is considered the oldest Arabic-Egyptian document. The papyrus was written in both Arabic and Greek (fig. 16), and is distinguished by the suppleness of some of its letters, whether the first, middle or last, along with some aspects of the dotting system. As several letters in the Arabic alphabet share the same form, it was necessary to develop a unique and efficient dotting system in order to distinguish between the different letters, as well as their pronunciation. It is known that the dotting system was first created by Nasr ibn-Asem and Yahia ibn-Ya'mar Al-Odwany by an order from the Umayyad ruler in Iraq, Al Hajjaj ibn-Youssef Al-Thaqafi (40-95 AH/ 660-714 CE) to put a system for writing a dotted



(Fig. 16) A bilingual papyrus written in both Greek (upper) and Arabic (lower), dates back to 22 H/ 642 CE. Will be replaced to the other side. Inv. G39.726 (RIV). © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Reproabeilung.

mushaf to avoid any misreading of the Quran by Muslims and non-Muslims.

Many Arabic papyri reached us today from different places, thanks to the official system of documenting correspondences. This system entailed – to document the correspondences – hiring the best calligraphers who revealed through their signatures the connected series of Egyptian Arabic calligraphy (Gareer, Omar, Rashed, Yazeed, Mohamed ibn-Oqba, Muslim ibn-Laban, Al-Salt, Rashed, Sarhan, Abdullah, and others).

Those pioneer calligraphers worked with precision, meticulousness and exquisite attention to detail, especially with regards to letter proportion and line organization and spacing. Their calligraphic works also bore touches of decorative artistry. Moreover, their writing had artistic and decorative touches. The most prominent example is a papyrus signed by Gareer, and kept in the National Library of Egypt (Dar Al Kotob).

The technical expression 'pen' is used when talking about the cursive writings due to the variety and diversity of its styles. Each style of the cursive script follows specific rules and measurements, and specific proportions between its letters and the letter 'alef' (ا). It also has specific measurements as to the thickness of the pen nib, the way it is cut or sharpened, the way it is held when writing, and the font size in relation to the paper size. This is unlike the angled Kufi script in which the calligrapher paid attention only to the decorative aspect and the geometrical symmetry between its letters, decorating them with geometric and vegetal patterns depending on his artistic skills and creativity. Thus, the term 'qalam' which means 'pen' or 'calligraphy' in Arabic does not apply except to the cursive scripts, because the thickness of the pen plays an essential role in determining the type. The Naskh is a type of cursive writing that was commonly used in writing manuscripts, and informal writings first on papyrus then on paper when it became more popular.

Thuluth Script

Another script, that was especially widely used in Mamluk Egypt, was Thuluth; known for its straight elongated letters. Thuluth script was first formulated by Kotba Moharrer (d. 154 AH) who laid the rules of balanced writing using the Tomar pen, the smallest of the Jalil al-Shami pens. The head of the Tomar pen is made of fronds and cane, and the pen nib is equal to 24 mule hairs. The 'Thuluthain' or two-thirds pen has 16 hairs, the 'nisf' or half pen has 12 hairs and the Thuluth or one third pen has 8 hairs.

This script developed very quickly by a group of master calligraphers especially in the Abbasid era, the most famous of which is Ibn-Muqla in the Ayubbid and Mamluk eras. This script was prevalent on buildings and artifact. Egyptian calligraphers developed this script and excelled in it that Al-Saidawy said in his verse:

He who uses Thuluth at all times,

Does well in all other styles.

The oldest example of this is the script on Al-Imam Al-Shafei's coffin (571 AH/ 1179 CE) and on the foundational text on the madrasa (575 AH/ 1179 CE) dedicated to the Shafei doctrine which was built next to Al Shafei's grave. However,

the most important Thuluth Ayubbid text on a building is the foundational text of the citadel of Salah Al-Din (579 AH/ 1183 CE) as it contains important political, historical and military content (Fig. 17). In this script, the lines and letters are straight, devoid of dotting and vowelization, and are neither interlaced not intersecting as is the case with later Thuluth. The words are written next to each other, and that is what characterized the early Thuluth script in the Ayyibid days and the Thuluth in the Mamluk times.

(Fig. 17) The foundation text of the Citadel was written in Thuluth calligraphy.

The most outstanding relation between Mamluk architecture in Egypt and Thuluth is the variety in types and shapes of the foundational texts on religious Mamluk buildings. Most of these foundational texts were spread on the facades of buildings in the form of a wide strip of engraved writing on Thuluth Mamluk stone. The most impressive of all is the foundational text of Sultan Qalawoun's compound (Fig. 18) which spreads along the whole facade, along the sides of the main entrances or in rectangular planks above the main entrances. These texts included the

(Fig. 18)The foundation text of Sultan al-Mansour Qalawoon's architectural complex (683-684H/ 1284- 1285CE), which is considered one of the greatest examples of Islamic architecture, as it includes nineteen foundation texts.

name of the owner, the date of construction and a brief description stating whether the building is a school, a mosque, or a hospital, and at times, the supervisor's name.

The Thuluth script took interesting forms on metal artifacts; in the candelabra of Prince Katabgha who ruled at the end of the 7th c. AH/ 13th c. CE, we see on the base of the candelabra's copper silver-plated neck the shapes of dancers created using the vertical lines of a Thuluth text that says: 'May the Prince be granted comfort, purity, and victory' Some of the letters were took animals and birds shapes (Fig. 19), and the 'alef' and 'lam' letters took vivid human forms. Inscribed on a candle holder that belonged to Sultan Qaitbay, is a prayer inscribed in his name in the form of fire flames between two stripes of leaved and flowered writings (Fig. 20).

Lighting artifacts were given special attention in Islamic art, and were decorated with magnificent inscriptions. An impressive example of this is the Thuluth script on the Mamluk 'mishka' which is a concave mirror (niche) in which lamps, candles, or other light sources are placed. Most of these were embellished with Quranic verses.

> '*Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: Lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive*'
>
> Al-Nur (35)

(Fig. 19) Candlestick owned by Prince Katbugha who ruled in the 7th Hijra century/13th CE century. The engravings show the skill of the calligrapher in using the heads of animals and birds as letters. The candle holder bears writings in Thuluth on both the top part and the body itself.

(Fig. 20) Candlestick owned by sultan Qaitbay (1486-1496 CE) made of copper decorated with bold inscriptions and naturalistic floral scrolls that characterize the stylistic features of his age. The inscriptions are in Thuluth calligraphy.

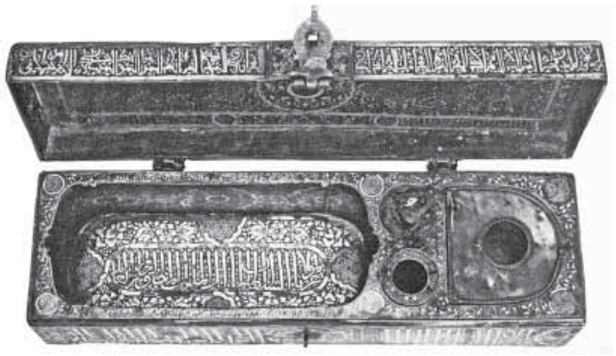
(Fig. 21) Sultan Hassan's glass lamp, dates back to the Mamluk era. The lamp is decorated with Quranic verses and names of Sultan Hassan. Found at the Sultan's school in Cairo, it is currently preserved at the Library of Alexandria.

As in the neck of the niche of Sultan Hassan (preserved in the Antiquities Museum at the Library of Alexandria). As for the body of the lamp, it contains the Sultan's name and titles, also in Thuluth script (Fig. 21).

Most of them were made of cane. Pens also got their share of attention due to their value. Pens that were made from cane showed the rules of writing, they were easy to use, and could be easily shaped to the preference of the writer to suit the size of his writing, the script adopted as well as the ability to write very fine inscriptions. Muslims sought to improve the pen to make it self sufficient without the need for an inkwell. The Fatimid Khalifa, Al-Mu'izz Lidin Allah thought out the shape of such a pen filled with ink and in no need for an inkwell. He described this pen to the manufacturer and followed up on the production. This pen was later known as the 'naba'a' or the spring. It is what is now known as the fountain pen, it wasn't widely used then for unknown reasons.

The cane pens needed other tools such as the inkwell for ink, a 'mas'ha' or 'daftar' which is a round or rectangular double-faced woolen or silk rag with a hole in the middle in which the pen is cleaned before the ink dries on it. Another tool is the 'gholaf' which is a cover for the pen nib. To preserve pens, Egyptians made copper pen cases that were sometimes gold or silver-plated. The stationery case of King El Mansour Mohamed (d. 764 AH/ 1363 CE), is an example of calligraphy-decorated cases where Kufi, Naskh and Thuluth scripts came together in one artifact (Figs. 22, 23) in a text that contained the king's titles and prayers for him.

As Egyptians were known for producing the most elegant writing material, a calligraphy school



(Fig. 22) A pen case of Al-Mansour mohamed (d. 764 H/1363 CE), where Thuluth, Naskh, and Kufic scripts coming together in one artifact, and with gold and silver ornamentations.

(Fig. 23) Writing tools.

was also established in Egypt in the Mamluk period. This school was known for publishing Mushafs, most of which are currently kept at the National Library of Egypt (Dar Al-Kotob) known for including a luminous mushaf that was owned by Sultan Baybars Jashankir, and written by the renowned calligrapher born in Damascus Sharaf Al-Din Mohamed ibn-Sharaf el-Din ibn-Youssef,

(Fig. 24) Sultan Babers al-Jashankir's Mushaf. One of the most impressive Mamluk Mushafs. (Ibn al wahid)

(Fig. 25) Sultan Babers al-Jashankir's Mushaf. One of the most impressive Mamluk Mushafs.

known as Ibn-Wahid (b. CE 1249) (Figs. 24, 25). In 1249 or 1250 he settled in Cairo where he served Baybars Jashankir since he was a prince and till he became Sultan. Ibn-Wahid was a scientist and he mastered many languages, and he showed skill in writing all scripts. He died in Cairo at the age of 61.

Ibn-Wahid used in writing the Mushaf a style that wasn't used later, known as third of tenths in which every page in the Mushaf comprises 6 lines – an unusual quality – and the style combines the Thuluth and Muhaqqaq. He used the Muhaqqaq, for example in the Mushaf of Sultan Shaaban, while the Thuluth script prevailed in the rest of the Mamluk Mushafs (Chart 18).

The greatest Mamluk Calligrapher is Abdel–Rahman ibn-el-Saegh, who wrote a complete Mushaf (Fig. 26), using the Muhaqqaq script, in 60 days as commanded by the Sultan Farag ibn-Barkouk. He never sat to write a mushaf except after performing ablution. Another Mushaf by Ibn-el-Saegh, also still exist. He completed it in Ramadan 814 AH in the Thuluth script. The Muhaqqaq script was used in some Mushafs due to its large size that suited the sizes of the books, as it looks like Thuluth, but a thicker pen is used in writing it. Muhaqqaq calligraphers took special care with the accurate lifting of some letters (ا، ل)

(Fig. 26) Sultan Farag Ibn Barkuk's Mushaf, copied by calligrapher Abdel Rahman Ibn al-Sa'egh.Mamluk Mushafs.

and the moderate dropping of letter cups and the attention paid to the parallelism between the falling letters like the 'Raa' and 'waw' (ر، و), as well as the use of the snake-shaped 'Kaf' (ک) at the beginning and middle of words, in addition to the spaces between words. This script was known as 'Muhaqqaq'. It was sometimes written on the same page in a smaller size called 'Rayhan', i.e. the same page contained two different scripts. And because the Mamluks adored the Thuluth script, it was widely used in their times, and Mushafs were written using it as well as the Naskh, and sometimes the Kufi especially in line heads.

If the Mamluk period is distinguished by

(Fig. 27) The renovation text of the Kabwa Mosque, Old Cairo, written in Thuluth. The Mosque was known in the past as the Kharrubiya School.

producing the Thuluth script, the Ottoman times in Egypt were known for the further development and additions to calligraphy retaining the Egyptian and Arabic spirit. This is clearly shown in a slab of white marble kept in the antiquities Museum at the Library of Alexandria (Fig. 27). The text refers to the renovation of a mosque in Al-Kharoubia in the old district. It goes back to times before the Ottoman era. A significant transformation occurred in the nature of using calligraphy on buildings between the Mamluk and the Ottoman eras. Arabic writing in both eras played an important role in bestowing buildings the appearance of strength and solidity, as well as adding some interest to the flat bare areas, and highlighting their attractive features.

The most dominant writing on Mamluk buildings was the scripts of foundational texts written on the building facades; they were mostly on the entrance door knobs, as on the knobs of the

west-side door of Al-Zahir Baybars Mosque (622 AH). Writing strips were also common on building facades as on the façade of Sultan Qalawoun mentioned earlier. We meet similar ones in the Ottoman era on Sultan Mahmoud Asaf El-Rafraf's drinking fountain (sabil) (1164 AH) (Fig. 28), where the text is written in the form of poetical verses; a characteristic of ottoman architecture. The oldest Ottoman poetic text to reach us in modern times, is the one found on the entrance of Dawoud Pasha's Mosque (961 AH/ 1553 CE), written on a small plaque made out of marble and placed high up over the entrance of the building (Fig. 29)

(Fig. 28) Sultan Mahmoud's sabil in Cairo, considered one of the most beautiful examples of Ottoman architecture in Egypt.

(Fig. 29) The foundation text of Daoud Pasha's Mosque. 961H/1553CE, in Cairo.

Nasta'liq script

Nasata'liq, first came into being in Persia and was called Nasata'liq, it then moved to Turkey where it was known as the Ta'liq script or the Turkish Ta'liq. The script was originally created by the Iranians in the 7th c. AH/ 14th c. CE. In the 9th c. AH/ 15th c. CE, the calligrapher Mir Ali AL-Tabrizi added to it some features of the Naskh script, thus the name 'Nasta'liq'. This script is not ornamented as its letters are innately beautiful though they may be manipulated on a very narrow scale.

The marble foundational text on the entrance of Youssef Agha El-Hin Mosque (1035 AH/ 1625 CE) (Fig. 30) is the oldest example of this script on Egyptian Islamic buildings. It is also a rare specimen among all Ottoman foundation texts. In this text, plant and leaf embellishments are interlaced with the words of the text. It shows one of the most prominent characteristics of Nasta'liq script, which is the slight inclination of words towards the right. The calligrapher determines the shapes of complex letters – their height and balance – without disturbing the unity and symmetry of the lines.

During the Ottoman period in Egypt, the Turkish language was gradually introduced as a formal language of correspondence, governmental procedures, architectural texts and artwork along with the Arabic. By the time of Mohamed Ali, government institutes, diwans, were managed in both Arabic and Turkish. The 'Khedive' s Journal'. Published in 1822, and 'Al-Waqa' 'i Al-Misriyya', in December 1828, were both printed in Arabic and Turkish. The Turkish language overtook the

Arabic, especially among the intelligencia; a fact that is clear in the renovation text (Fig. 31), written in Turkish, of the Salah El Din Citadel, at the time of Mohamed Ali. Another example is the Turkish foundational text of the Bulaq Press (Fig. 32), a prominent Egyptian Publishing house that played an essential role in bringing to light the Arabic scientific and literary masterpieces. A third example, is the foundational text for the ablution fountain of Mohamed Ali (1263 AH), where Persian words are, for the first time, used in Islamic architecture, to also represent the third language to be used in Egyptian architecture during the 19th century CE.

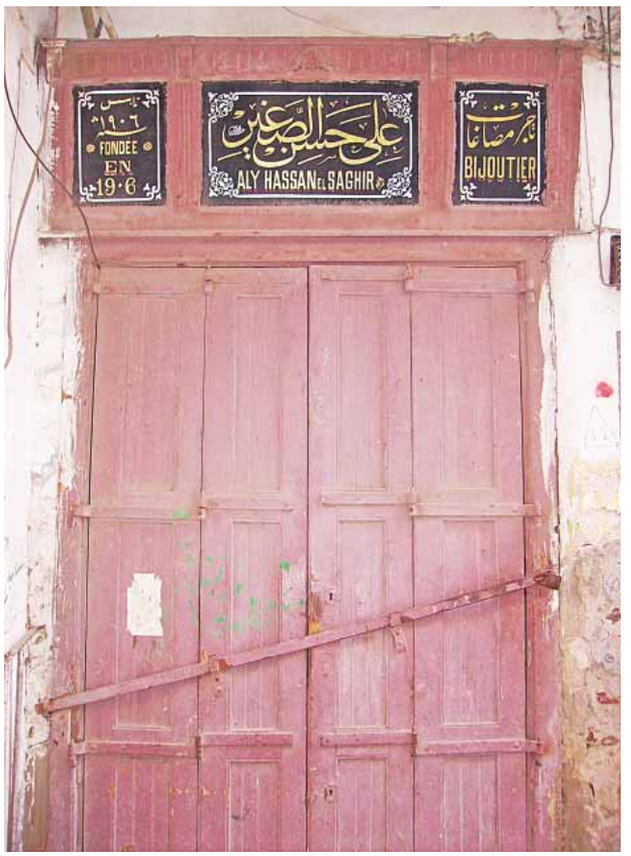
(Fig. 30) Youssef Agha's Mosque, established in 1035H/1625CE. Considered to be one of the hanging mosques in Cairo, the mosque has the oldest foundation text written in Nasta'liq in Egypt.

(Fig. 31) A marble plaque on the old entrance to the Citadel, bearing a record of all the renovations done to the Citadel in Mohamed Ali's time. The text is written in Turkish Nasta'liq in the form of poetry verses.

(Fig. 32) The foundation text of the Bulaq Press. Established by Mohamed Ali to become the biggest Arab Press. This text was written in Turkish Nasta'liq in three line in the form of poetry verses.

During the time of Mohamed Ali, the Persian language was taught in Egyptian schools, but never used in governmental correspondences and diwans. It was considered a well from which the rich Arabic language drew from the Persian origins present in the Turkish language. Persian writings appeared on the walls of Mohamed Ali's Mosque, when he summoned the prominent and well-known Persian calligrapher Mirza Sanglakh. Inscriptions at this time in Egypt were a place for linguistic interaction. In various monuments, five languages are present; Arabic, Turkish, old Egyptian (Coptic), and French. In all Egyptian history, this is the largest linguistic display on monuments, all belonging to the same century. Three calendars were also used; Hijri, Coptic, and Julian which was first used in CE January 1876.

Foreign communities living in Egypt also used their native languages in their everyday life, to the extent that Egyptians started doing the same;



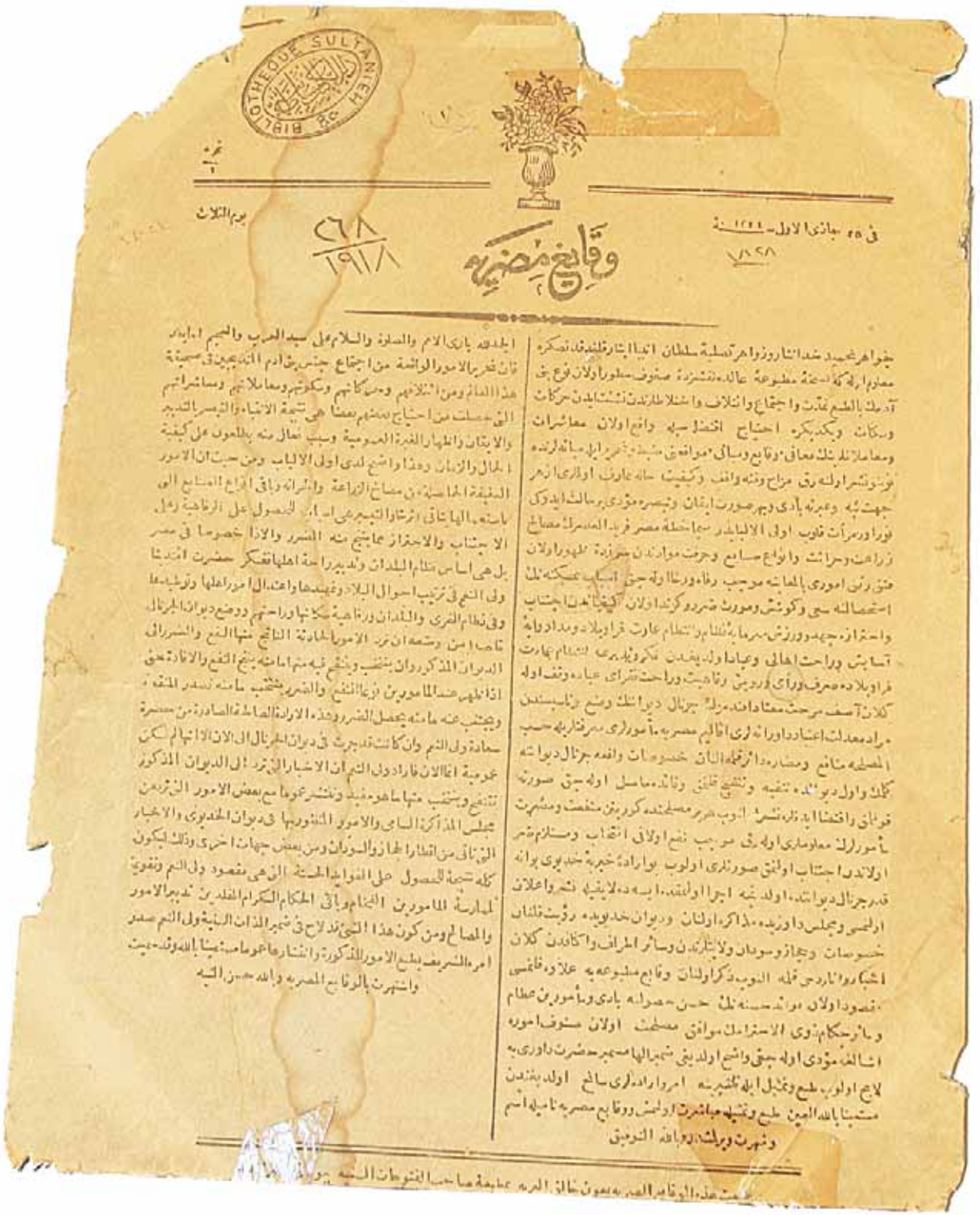
(Fig. 33) A name of Jewellery shop in Alexandrina, it dates back to 1906, and is written in Arabic and French.

one merchant, Mohamed Ahmed Abdel Nabi, used both Arabic and French on the plaque of this shop, CE 1898. The name of the Ottoman Bank in Alexandria was also written on its headquarters in both Arabic and French (Fig. 34). This extensive use of multiple languages in 19th century Egypt resulted in the incorporation of foreign words and expressions in the Egyptian informal dialect to the extent that Refa'a Al-Tahtawy, a prominent Azhar scholar and an important Egyptian character used French words, like 'bal', 'seigneur', and 'famille' in his poem congratulating the Khedive on the marriage of his sons, in spite of the presence of

alternative words in the Arabic language which he mastered.

It would thus be appropriate to mention that Mohamed Ali's administration was divided into Arabic and Turkish sections, executing their tasks in their specific languages. The Turkish section, however, was considered to be higher as it is the original one and the source of legislation. The Pasha's orders and those of his assistants would be translated from Turkish into Arabic, and announced through the Arabic section. 'The Khedive's Journal' (CE 1822) and 'Al Waqa'i Al Masriyya' (CE 1828), were both published in Arabic and Turkish (Fig. 35). They're also the seeds of Egyptian journalism that provided calligraphers with a wide space for creativity despite the diminishing need for handwritten books which lost ground to printed ones. However, the interest of Said Pasha's and later Khedive Ismail in Arabization of texts helped maintain the high quality of calligraphy. They sent for several calligraphers, such as Abdullah Zohdi who was called upon by Khedive Ismail, and was hired as a calligraphy teacher in the Khedaweyah School, and prominent Egyptian calligraphers were his students like Mohamed Moenes, a professor of many artists; and Me'mar Zadah Mohamed Ali, the calligrapher and artist who served in many national Egyptian institutions. The most important event in the history of Arabic writing in Egypt would be the establishment of a royal school for improving Arabic calligraphy by King Fouad in CE 1923. A number of great Arabic calligraphers were hired like Naguib Hawawini, and Mohamed Hosni. In 1936, Artist Mohamed Ibrahim established a school to improve calligraphy in Alexandria. It is interesting to mention that those calligraphers were so skilled that lawyer Hassan Abdel-Gawwad Awad wrote on an empty eggshell all the achievements that took place during the reign of Khedive Ismail, and even more impressive was the same calligrapher writing on a wheat grain the names of all the men who ruled Egypt from Amr ibn-al-'As to King Fouad.

(Fig. 34) The name of the Ottoman Sultan Bank at the Manshiya Square in Alexandria, in Arabic and French.



(Fig. 35) The first issue of the Egyptian newspaper al-Waqa'I al-Misriya.

Notes

1 Wadi Moussa today

2 Abdul-Moneim Abdul-Hamid, Sayed. *The Nabatean Relations with Egypt Through the Nabatean Inscriptions on the Hejaz Rocks, Egypt's Eastern Desert, the Red Sea in Ancient Times.* Part1 (Alexandria, 1993), 463

3 Abdul-Moneim Abdul-Hamid Sayed, *The Nabatean Relations with Egypt Through the Nabatean Inscriptions in the Red Sea in Ancient Times*. Part 1, (Alexandria, 1993), 235

4 Abdel Haleem Sayed: *Old Arabic Abjadiyyat, and the Creation of Arabic Calligraphy.* 237-239. See also: Abdel Rahman Omar Mohamed Spindary, *Writing the Quran in the Meccan Period*. (Rabbat, 2002).

5 Said ibn-Fayez Al-Said, *The Cultural Relations between the Arab Peninsula and Egypt with Regards to the Old Arabic Inscriptions. (*Riyadh, 2003), 69-96.