

Strokes and Hairlines

Elegant Writing and its Place in Muslim Book Culture



Adam Gacek

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in Muslim Book Culture

An Exhibition in Celebration of the 60th Anniversary of
The Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University

February 11–June 30, 2013
McLennan Library Building Lobby

Curated by
Adam Gacek

On the front cover: folio 1a from MS Rare Books and Special Collections AC156; for a description of and another illustration from the same manuscript see p.28.

On the back cover: photograph of Morrice Hall from Islamic Studies Library archives

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Foreword

Khatt and *Kitāb*—calligraphy and book—are two of the distinctive features of Islamic civilization. Millions of Islamic manuscripts spread throughout the world are vivid reminders that Muslims are “people of the book” (*ahl al-kitāb*) in several meanings of the phrase. And many of these books were written in scripts meant not just to be functional, but as aesthetic expressions of a deep commitment to learning, art, and religious devotion.

We are very fortunate at McGill to be custodians of exquisite exemplars of these books and writings, as well as implements used to produce them. And we are equally fortunate to have one of the world’s leading authorities on Islamic calligraphy and codicology associated with the Institute of Islamic Studies, Mr. Adam Gacek. Mr. Gacek served admirably for many years as head of the Islamic Studies Library and more recently has been a faculty lecturer in the Institute of Islamic Studies and a research associate with the Rational Sciences in Islam project housed at the Institute. This exhibit, “Strokes and Hairlines, Elegant Writing and its Place in Muslim Book Culture,” brings together remarkable and beautiful examples from our collections that provide important windows not only on the bookmaker’s craft but also on the world of learning in Islamic lands. Mr. Gacek has put together an exhibit accompanied by this descriptive booklet that are delights to both mind and eye.

We are currently commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Institute’s founding, and “Strokes and Hairlines” is an ideal way to celebrate both the Islamic cultural heritage and the Institute’s long commitment to the study of Islamic codicology and calligraphy. Thanks to a generous gift from the government of Qatar, the exhibit will run from February 11- June 30, 2013 in the McLennan Library Building Lobby and will be supplemented

and enhanced in February 2013—our “month of calligraphy”—by lectures and workshops by Mr. Gacek as well as by the renowned calligraphers Mr. Haji Noor Deen and Dr. Hilal Kazan, who will be coming from China and Turkey, respectively.

I invite you to visit our website, <http://www.mcgill.ca/islamicstudies/60-years>, where you will find details on these events and many more to follow that highlight the theme of our 60th anniversary celebration, “The Diversity of Islam.”

F. Jamil Ragep
Professor and Director
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Introduction

Among the rare books in the McGill University Library there are some 670 volumes of manuscripts written in the Arabic, Persian, Ottoman-Turkish, and Urdu languages. In addition, there are approximately 280 single or double-leaf fragments and pieces of calligraphy, including illustrations from Persian MSS and signed calligraphs. Originally these manuscripts were housed in four different libraries, namely Blacker-Wood Library of Zoology and Ornithology, Osler Library of the History of Medicine, Rare Books and Special Collections Division and the Islamic Studies Library. Today, except for the collection belonging to the Osler Library of the History of Medicine, the other collections are housed in Rare Books and Special Collections.

The manuscripts at McGill embrace all aspects of Islamic literature: Qur'anic exegesis, Tradition (*Hadith*), Jurisprudence, Philosophy, Theology, Mysticism, History, Belles Lettres, and Sciences. Well-represented among the latter is Medicine and the Natural Sciences. Thus, for example, among the manuscripts in the Blacker-Wood collection there are a number of important illustrated texts on falconry and farriery, while Rare Books and Special Collections houses 20 early fragments of the Qur'an and some of the finest examples of book illustration and decoration. These collections span the period from the 9th to the early 20th centuries, with a good number of manuscripts from the late medieval period.

Drawing on these rich manuscript collections of the McGill Library, this exhibition explores the beauty of handwritten specimens in Arabic script from a vast area, stretching from the Maghreb to India, and from a variety of historical periods. Selected exhibits include parchment leaves from Qur'ans produced in the early Abbasid period (9th - 10th centuries), pieces of calligraphy from the Arab world, Iran, and India,

diplomas granted to Ottoman calligraphers, writing implements such as reed pens and pen boxes, and much more. It has been organized to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University.

Case 1a

The Qur'an

“The one who writes beautifully ‘In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate’, will have his sins forgiven.”¹

Islam is the religion of the book. The Qur'an for the Muslim is, therefore, the book *par excellence* and this fact is fundamental to an understanding of the Muslim religion and Islamic manuscript-making as a whole. Although originally any addition of colored ink to the copied text of the Qur'an was strictly prohibited, over time this book became the most decorated and cherished of all books among Muslims.

A specific etiquette, applicable to both the reader and the scribe, grew around the process. The scribe, for instance, was required to be in a state of ritual purity (*ṭahārah*), wear clean clothes and face the Ka'ba (in Mecca) while engaged in copying the Book (*al-Kitāb*).

The copying of the Qur'an was very meritorious for the Muslim. In fact, it was regarded as an act of worship, which drew upon the calligrapher numerous blessings from God. It is thus not surprising that calligraphers and illuminators, throughout the manuscript age, tried to surpass themselves in producing the most sumptuous copies of the Qur'an.

Some of the most visually stunning manuscripts of the Qur'an were produced in the early Abbasid period (8th -10th centuries). They exhibit a variety of calligraphic styles and decorations,

¹ A tradition (*ḥadīth*) on the authority of Wahb ibn Munabbih (d.ca.732).

as well as diacritical pointing by means of slanted strokes and vocalization using red dots. The horizontal-format manuscripts of that period often had only a few lines per page, which meant that in order to produce a complete copy of a parchment Qur'an, between 500 and 700 animals had to be slaughtered.

Exhibits

Written in a large Early Abbasid script (“Kufic”), with five lines to the page, this leaf from a parchment Qur’an shows diacritical pointing by means of slanted strokes and vocalization using red dots. The medallion in the right-hand corner indicates the 90th verse of Chapter 17 (*sūrat al-Isrāʾ*). Among the many characteristics of these early scripts is the free-standing *alif* with its foot turned right and a substantial gap between it and the next letter.

Rare Books and Special Collections AC194



A leaf from a very elegant illuminated parchment Qur'an made probably in the late 9th or the beginning of the 10th century. Each page has six lines of a neatly executed block of text. The golden medallion in the middle of the fourth line indicates verse 70 of Chapter 17 (*sūrat al-Isrā'*). It is vocalized by means of red dots.

Rare Books and Special Collections AC195



A parchment leaf from a Qur'an from the early Abbasid period, having a distinct horizontal format. There are 15 lines to the page and the third line, penned in gold ink, is a chapter heading for *sūrat al-Anbiyā'* (Chapter 21).

Rare Books and Special Collections AC175



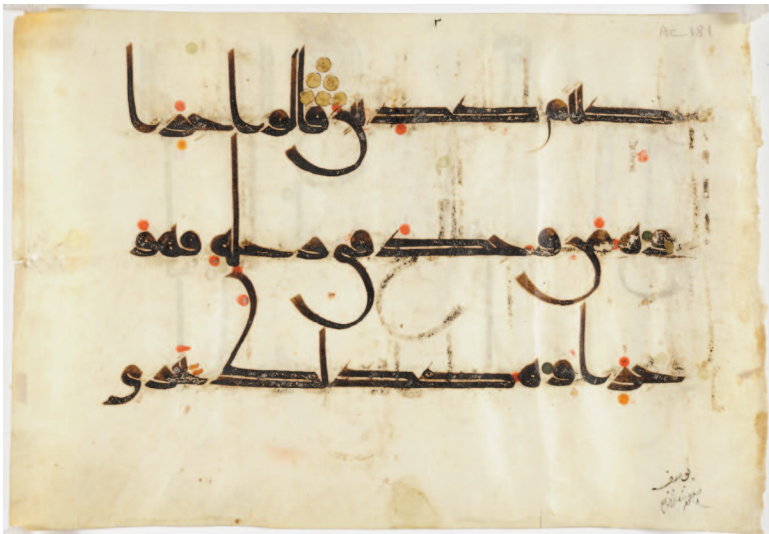
A parchment leaf from a very small Qur'an showing a portion of Chapter 22 (*sūrat al-Ḥājj*). It was copied in gold in the New Abbasid style, using the traditional vocalization by means of red dots. This hand has a number of distinct characteristics such as a slightly bent *alif* with a short head-serif on the left of its shaft and an angular (as opposed to round) body for such letters as *fāʾ/qāf*, *ʿayn/ghayn* and *wāw*. It was executed probably in the late 10th century.

Rare Books and Special Collections AC166



A parchment leaf from an early Abbasid Qurʾan (Chapter 12 – *sūrat Yūsuf*, vv.74-76). Written with only three lines to the page, this hand has a number of characteristic features such as rounded sub-linear strokes on the final *yāʾ* and *nūn* and a hairline descender (tail) on the final *mīm*. It is vocalized by red dots with verse markers indicated by gold dots arranged in a triangle.

Rare Books and Special Collections AC181



Case 1b

Scripts and Hands

“Tears upon the cheeks of chaste young women are no more beautiful than tears of a calamus in a manuscript.”²

Throughout the manuscript period a great variety of scripts and styles of handwriting were used. Indeed, from a very defective script that hardly distinguished between various forms of letters and entirely lacked vocalization, Arabic developed into a vehicle of thought and culture without precedence in other civilizations. It is said that in the late Mamluk period (14th and 15th centuries) alone, Arab calligraphers had at their disposal some 42 scripts. Some scripts became entirely associated with either the type of work or subject matter.

Thus, in the 8th and 9th centuries, almost all Qurʾans were executed in often very heavy Early Abbasid scripts (popularly known as *Kūfī* or *Kufic*). In the 10th century, there came onto the scene the New Abbasid style (previously known as *Eastern* or *semi-Kufic*). Large Qurʾans of the later Middle Ages were usually calligraphed in a script called *muḥaqqaq*, whereas the middle-size Ottoman Qurʾans were mostly executed in *naskh*. In the lands under Persian rule or influence, the script felt to be the most suited for poetry was *nastaʿlīq*.

In the Maghreb, on the other hand, a very different family of scripts developed. Having their origins in the late 9th and early 10th centuries, these scripts and their letterforms are not learned individually according to specified norms, as is the case

² Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf, secretary of the Caliph al-Maʾmūn (d.833).

with the newer 'proportioned' scripts of the Islamic East. Instead, writing is learned by imitating complete words. There are great differences in style; some manuscripts were written with very thin nibs, others with thicker ones and the scripts vary from very small to very large, often spiky in appearance. Moreover, the form of a letter is never characteristic of a style. On a single page, executed by the same hand, one may encounter up to four different shapes of the same letter. Looking at some manuscripts, one forms the impression of admiring a composition rather like a spider's web.

Exhibits

A bi-folio containing a fragment of an illuminated parchment Qur'an (Chapter 6 – *sūrat al-An'ām*) written in *Maghribī* script, probably in the 15th century. The text has seven lines to the page and each verse is marked with a golden trefoil. The orthoepic signs, such as *shaddah* and *sukūn*, are in blue ink.

Rare Books and Special Collections AC183, folio 1b-2a



A medium-size volume representing a portion of the Qurʾan (Chapter 18, v.72 - Chapter 20, i.e., *sūrat al-Kahf - Ṭāʾ-hā*). Written on thick Arab paper in a heavy Mamluk *naskh* script, it is fully vocalized. The letter *alif* in this hand has no head-serif and its shaft tapers towards its lower end, looking almost like a wedge. It also has a distinct *lām alif* ligature with its triangular base. The manuscript was originally housed in the Khānqāh al-Barqūqiyah in Cairo. Probably 14th century.

Rare Books and Special Collections A22, folio 39a



An illuminated copy of the Qurʾan executed by Ḥusayn al-Amāsī, Imam of Mehmet the Conqueror's Mosque in Istanbul, in 1072/1661. It was copied in Ottoman *naskh* script with a characteristic head-serif on the letter *lām* (and other letters such as *tāʾ*) in the shape of a slightly up-turned short stroke on the left of its shaft.

Rare Books and Special Collections A19, folio 235a - chapter heading (*sūrat al-Sajdah*, 32) in *tawqīʿ* script on gold background



A copy of the Qur'an in *naskh* script, with an interlinear Persian translation in *nasta'liq* script in red ink. It opens with a Kashmiri style double-page illuminated frontispiece. The up-strokes (ascenders) of such letters as *alif* and *lām* are very thin and have no head- or foot-serifs. The manuscript was copied in Hyderabad between 1282/1865-6 and 1289/1872-3.

Rare Books and Special Collections A20, folio 212a - chapter heading (*sūrat al-Anbiyā'*, 21)



An elephant folio Mughal Qur'an measuring 575 x 325 mm. It was executed in large fully vocalized *thuluth* and *Bihārī* scripts and contains five double-page illuminations. The *Bihārī* hand has characteristic large, extended bodies for such letters as *ṣād/dād* and *ṭāʾ/ẓāʾ*, as well as triangular heads for *fāʾ/qāf*, *ʿayn/ghayn* and *wāw*. The main text is enclosed in a ruled panel and surrounded by two outer panels, the first containing selected key words written in red and blue, the second, glosses in Persian arranged in a zigzag form. The present copy was made in the 16th century, most probably for a mosque.

Rare Books and Special Collections A29, folio 376b (*sūrat al-Ṭūr*, 52)



Case 2a

Calligraphers' Diplomas

“Handwriting is jewelry fashioned by the hand from the pure gold of the intellect.”³

The granting of certificates or diplomas (*ijāzāt*) for individual works is one of the hallmarks of the Islamic manuscript age. Certificates in such disciplines as Tradition (*Ḥadīth*) were granted as early as the 9th century. The granting of diplomas to calligraphers appears to have started in the 14th century during the Mamluk period and became characteristic of Ottoman practice during the 17th, 18th and the 19th centuries.

A typical diploma of the period consisted of a decorated composition, executed usually in two scripts: a large *thuluth* (top line) and regular size *naskh* (main field). The composition traditionally consisted of quotations from Muslim tradition or well-known sayings or proverbs. The certificate itself was inscribed in a cartouche at the bottom of the work. Some pieces, however, may have two or more certificates by several master calligraphers. The main element of the certificate was the expression “I give him permission to use the word *kataba*” (literally, “to write”) at the end of a calligraphic piece (*qiṭ‘ah*). The certificates were usually inscribed by master calligraphers in a script (*khatt*) that takes its name from the word “certificate” (*ijāzah*), thus, *khatt al-ijāzah*.

Short compositions were usually mounted on one piece of cardboard. Longer compositions, on the other hand, were made

³ Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam (9th century).

into a portfolio, folded in the middle, with the writing and decorations spread over two pages.

Certificates were also attached to longer pieces of work, such as a short chapter from the Qurʾan, for instance, *sūrat* 77 (*al-Mursalāt*), copied in 1769-70 by Muḥammad Amīn Afandī (AC157), or a tract on calligraphy, as is the case with the work of ʿAbd Allāh al-Anīs (d.1746), transcribed by the Egyptian calligrapher Ḥasan al-Rushdī in 1744-5 (AC156).

Exhibits

A unique illuminated small codex containing a diploma (*ijāzah*) granted by the Egyptian calligrapher ‘Abd Allāh al-Anīs al-Mawlawī (d.1746) to his student Ḥasan al-Rushdī in 1157/1744-5. Ḥasan was a slave of ‘Alī Aghā, an Ottoman emissary who had bought him in his youth and educated him in the art of penmanship. He later married the daughter of his master calligrapher and was declared the shaykh of calligraphers. The main text is followed by 12 additional diplomas by such famous Ottoman calligraphers of the day as Muḥammad al-Nūrī, Ismā‘īl al-Zuhdī, Ḥasan al-Ḍiyā‘ī, Ibrāhīm al-Riwaydī, Muḥammad al-Azhārī, and Muḥammad Najīb Ṣuyūlijī-zādah, who met Ḥasan in Rosetta in 1163/1750.

Rare Books and Special Collections AC156, folio 8b-9a — five diplomas and an attendance note



A calligraphic piece (*qiṭ‘ah*) with two diplomas granted to Muḥammad Tawfiq Afandī by Muḥammad Rashīd Shālījī-zādah and Ḥusayn al-Ḥusnī in 1265/1848-9. The first half of the top line in *thuluth* script on green background reads: *Allāh walī al-tawfiq* – “God is the guarantor of success”, followed by the second half in small *naskh*, reading *wa-huwa ni‘ma al-Rafīq* – “and what an excellent Friend He is.” The diplomas can be seen inscribed in two cartouches at the bottom of the composition in the script known as *ijāzah*, with the letters *alif* and *lām* having strokes protruding from their heads and wrapping around their shafts.

Rare Books and Special Collections AC57



A small illuminated booklet containing Chapter 77 (*sūrat al-Mursalāt*) of the Qur'an with two diplomas inscribed on the last page for Muḥammad Amīn Afandī by two well-known Ottoman calligraphers, Muḥammad Nūrī and Muḥammad al-Sa'īd Mustaqīm-zādah, in 1183/1769-70.

Rare Books and Special Collections AC157, last page



A calligraphic copy of the well-known poem in honor of the prophet Muhammad, *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* (“The mantle”), by Muḥammad ibn Sa‘īd al-Būṣīrī (d.1294). The manuscript was penned by the Ottoman calligrapher ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jīnjī-zādah in 1093/1682. The body of the text is divided into three rectangular panels inscribed in *thuluth* script, and two smaller compartments with lines executed in *naskh*. The *thuluth* hand has very sharp, barb-like head-serifs.

Rare Books and Special Collections A8, folio 7b



A collection of prayers, *Jawāhir al-anwār* (“Gems of light/illumination”), beautifully decorated and calligraphed in Ottoman *naskh* script by Ibrāhīm al-Rudūsī in 1165/1751-2. Al-Rudūsī’s *naskh* employs very short serifs, sometimes resembling little ink-blots, on the head of the letter *lām*.

Rare Books and Special Collections A4, folio 6b



Case 2b

The *Alif* and Other Letterforms

“The heart is a mine, the intellect a precious mineral, the tongue a miner, the calamus a goldsmith, and the handwriting, a finished piece of jewelry.”⁴

Although Arabic script was originally very unrefined, devoid even of diacritical points and vowel marks, it developed very quickly and became a delight for the eye of the beholder. The first letter, *alif* (ا), is the most important letter of the alphabet, and in the alpha-numerical system (*abjad*) it represents number 1.

Unlike all the other letters of the Arabic alphabet, which are treated as being of feminine gender, the word *alif* can be either feminine or masculine. Furthermore, like some of the other letters of the alphabet, its anatomy mimics human/animal anatomy. Thus, it is spoken of as having a head, nape, forehead, face, belly, groin, hips, knee, and tail. This association with the human/animal body is also clearly visible in the description of the *alif* in *thuluth* script as “a figure of a man looking at his feet”.

The *alif* and other letters with ascending upstrokes often have protruding strokes at their heads. Some look like barbs and others almost like a short beak on a bird. These are called head-serifs and are of fundamental importance in the palaeographical analysis of bookhands. Of great importance for palaeographers

⁴ Bishr al-Mu‘tamir (d.825).

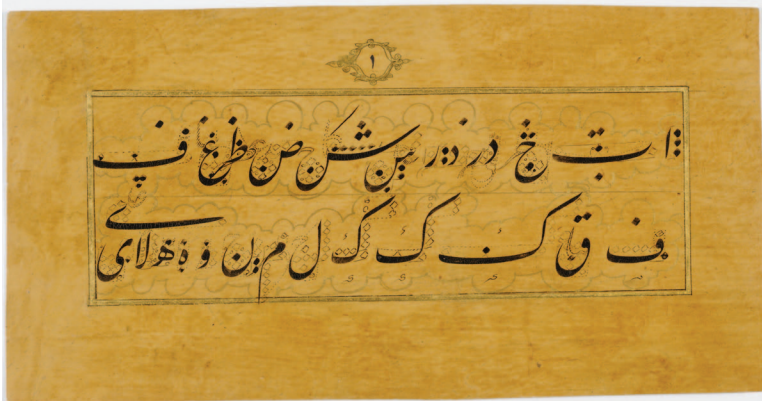
also are the various shapes of sub-linear strokes, hairlines, and squiggles.

The second most important letter is actually a ligature, the *lām alif* (ﻻ), regarded in the manuscript age as the 29th letter of the Arabic alphabet, and traditionally placed before the letter *yā'* in this sequence. In the proportioned scripts of the Islamic East this ligature has three distinct varieties. The most popular is the "*lām alif* of the scribes" (*al-warrāqīyah*) with its triangular base. In the Maghreb, however, the number of possible forms of this letter is much greater: upwards of 16 distinct shapes.

Exhibits

A leaf from an album of *nasta'liq* calligraphy (*muraqqa'*) by Muḥammad Qāsim Tabrīzī, dated 1284/1867-8. Introduced in the late 15th century, *nasta'liq* became the Persian script par excellence. Here the calligrapher shows individual letterforms measured by means of rhombic dots, which was a standard method used for proportioned scripts, such as *thuluth*.

Rare Books and Special Collections AC158, first leaf



This 270 cm.-long roll (scroll) is an amulet containing prayers for protection (*Du‘ā-yi Jawshan-i kabīr*, *Jawshan-i ṣaġhīr*, etc.) made for the Qajar vizier Mu‘tamad al-Sharī‘ah (d.1882-3). It was calligraphed by Zayn al-‘Abidīn ibn ‘Alī in very small black Persian *naskh* and red *tawqī‘/riqā‘* scripts.

Rare Books and Special Collections A12, fragment



A textbook on Rhetoric, *Talkhīṣ al-Miftāḥ*, by al-Khaṭīb al-Dimashqī (d.1338). Copied in an elegant Persian *nasta'liq* hand in 960/1552-3, this volume contains four miniatures, including a depiction of two scholars engaged in some form of discussion or disputation.

Rare Books and Special Collections A3, folio 98b-99a



A copy of *al-Rawḍah al-bahīyah* (“The Beautiful Garden”), a commentary on the compendium of Shi‘ite law known as *al-Lum‘ah al-Dimashqīyah* by al-Shahīd al-Thānī (d.1559). This manuscript was copied in *nasta‘līq* script by the Iranian scribe Muḥsin ibn Muḥammad Maḥdī al-Tūysirkānī during his stay in Najaf (Iraq) in 1267/1851. The end of the text, as well as the scribal colophon, is arranged in two triangles.

Rare Books and Special Collections ISL9, folio 207b-208a



This beautifully illuminated copy of *Kitāb-i nasāyih* or *Pand-nāmah* (“Book of Exhortations”) by ‘Abd Allāh Haravī (d.1088) was calligraphed in *shikastah nasta‘liq* script in 1278/1861-2. *Shikastah nasta‘liq*, i.e. “broken” *nasta‘liq*, originated in Iran in the 17th century as a result of writing *nasta‘liq* rapidly. One of its characteristics is the final form of the letter *nūn* executed in reverse.

Rare Books and Special Collections P10, folio 1b-2a



Case 3a

Calligraphy and Painted Decoration

“Strive to write elegantly for this will ensure your means of livelihood.”⁵

Elegant writing and painted decoration (illumination) frequently go hand in hand. Very often the calligrapher is also an illuminator. There are numerous statements to this effect found in colophons of manuscripts, the most common being *kataba wa-dhahhabahu* (“he penned and gilded it”). The calligrapher can also be responsible for the design of the page, rubricated or polychrome text, the drawing of outlines (for large letters executed in a different color), and frames around the main body of the text.

Manuscripts produced for patrons were often elegantly decorated using geometrical and vegetal (arabesque) motifs. The areas especially favored for illumination were the verso of the first and the recto of the second folios, the last page, and the title page, especially in the case of patronage statements. Numerous manuscripts, especially those of the Qurʾan, feature double-page (mirror image) frontispieces, richly decorated incipit pages, and exquisite chapter headings, tailpieces and finispieces.

The text itself was often the object of special attention on the part of the calligrapher-illuminator. Here, chapter headings played an important role. Set in a frame with colored background, these headings were often executed in a larger script than the one used for the rest of the composition. In numerous large Qurʾans,

⁵ Caliph ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d.661).

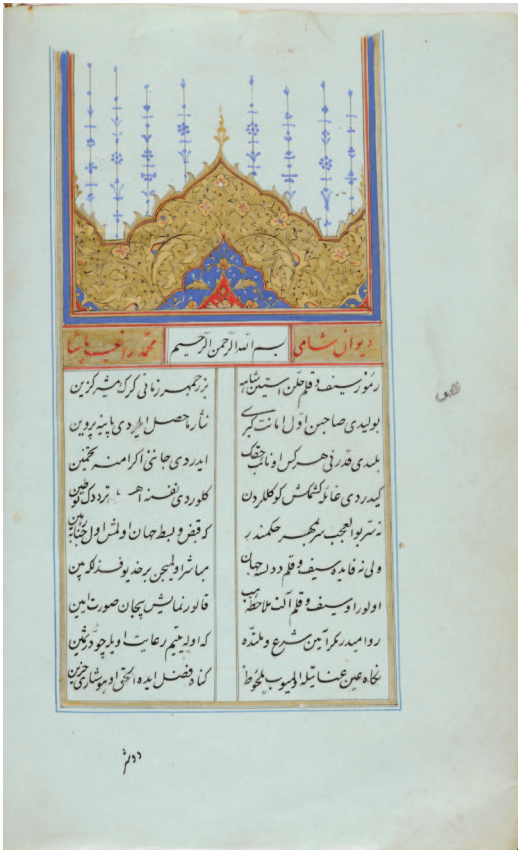
for instance, we encounter the use of *thuluth* script or decorated versions of the New Abbasid style.

Manuscripts of Persian and Indian provenance are often characterized by richly illuminated headpieces or entire double-page openings. Persian illuminators tended to use more *lapis lazuli* than other colors. On the other hand, we find a lot of brick-red ink and yellow gouache in Indian productions, and generous use of gilt in manuscripts of Ottoman manufacture.

Exhibits

A collection of Turkish poetry (*Dīvān*) by Rāḡib Pāṣā (d.1176/1763). This illuminated manuscript was copied in *nasta'liq* script on tinted buff and light-blue, pink, and yellow papers in 1260/1844 by a calligrapher of Persian origin named Muḥammad 'Alī al-Shīrāzī. The opening page shows a headpiece richly decorated with gilt.

Rare Books and Special Collections T2, folio 1b



A polychrome Turkish calendar for the year Rabī' I 1129 to Rabī' I, 1130 (1718) dedicated to the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed III. It was executed in three scripts: *thuluth*, *tawqī'*, and *naskh*. *Thuluth* and its smaller version *tawqī'* were originally scripts used for documents in the chancery.

Rare Books and Special Collections T1, folio 3a

جمادى الاخره		الاربعاء	الخميس	الجمعة	الاربعاء	الخميس	الجمعة
جمادى الاخره جمعه ارشده لکجه خنوب زاره الجنى ونايشنى كوز بيلگه		۹	۸	سفته	۹	۸	سفته
فقول عشق شور ازايشه افروز		۱۰	۹	چهارشنبه	۱۰	۹	چهارشنبه
ساعت پر سقاوه زاهو ونايش		۱۱	۱۰	پنجشنبه	۱۱	۱۰	پنجشنبه
آفرسته نشور		۱۲	۱۱	جمعه	۱۲	۱۱	جمعه
ابانماه ده		۱۳	۱۲	سفته	۱۳	۱۲	سفته
طالع ونگا		۱۴	۱۳	چهارشنبه	۱۴	۱۳	چهارشنبه
		۱۵	۱۴	پنجشنبه	۱۵	۱۴	پنجشنبه
		۱۶	۱۵	جمعه	۱۶	۱۵	جمعه
		۱۷	۱۶	سفته	۱۷	۱۶	سفته
		۱۸	۱۷	چهارشنبه	۱۸	۱۷	چهارشنبه
		۱۹	۱۸	پنجشنبه	۱۹	۱۸	پنجشنبه
زرا بزم مهر		۲۰	۱۹	جمعه	۲۰	۱۹	جمعه
نشد بس سعوز		۲۱	۲۰	سفته	۲۱	۲۰	سفته
روز شنبه		۲۲	۲۱	چهارشنبه	۲۲	۲۱	چهارشنبه
روز شنبه		۲۳	۲۲	پنجشنبه	۲۳	۲۲	پنجشنبه
روز شنبه		۲۴	۲۳	جمعه	۲۴	۲۳	جمعه
روز شنبه		۲۵	۲۴	سفته	۲۵	۲۴	سفته
روز شنبه		۲۶	۲۵	چهارشنبه	۲۶	۲۵	چهارشنبه
روز شنبه		۲۷	۲۶	پنجشنبه	۲۷	۲۶	پنجشنبه
روز شنبه		۲۸	۲۷	جمعه	۲۸	۲۷	جمعه
روز شنبه		۲۹	۲۸	سفته	۲۹	۲۸	سفته
روز شنبه		۳۰	۲۹	چهارشنبه	۳۰	۲۹	چهارشنبه
روز شنبه		۱	۳۰	پنجشنبه	۱	۳۰	پنجشنبه
روز شنبه		۲	۱	جمعه	۲	۱	جمعه
روز شنبه		۳	۲	سفته	۳	۲	سفته
روز شنبه		۴	۳	چهارشنبه	۴	۳	چهارشنبه
روز شنبه		۵	۴	پنجشنبه	۵	۴	پنجشنبه
روز شنبه		۶	۵	جمعه	۶	۵	جمعه
روز شنبه		۷	۶	سفته	۷	۶	سفته
روز شنبه		۸	۷	چهارشنبه	۸	۷	چهارشنبه
روز شنبه		۹	۸	پنجشنبه	۹	۸	پنجشنبه

A richly illuminated manuscript of one of the best known prayer books in Islam, *Dalā'il al-khayrāt* ("Tokens of good things/ blessings"), by Muḥammad al-Jazūlī (d.1472). Made in India for Mīr Ghulām Hādī in 1196/1782, the manuscript was written in a *naskh* script with head-serifs on such letters as *alif* and *lām*.

Rare Books and Special Collections A6, folio 37a



Dated 1064/1683 and written in an elegant Indian *naskh* script, this illuminated manuscript contains prayers attributed to the Caliph ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d.661), ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d.1167), and a certain Ibrāhīm al-Wuṣṣālī.

Rare Books and Special Collections ISL42, folio 20b



Dīvān-i Sa‘dī, a collection of poems by the illustrious Persian poet Sa‘dī (d.1293). This manuscript, containing ten beautifully illuminated pages, was calligraphed in *nasta‘līq* script in 1097/1686 by Durr Allāh Kashmīrī, which name points to the manuscript’s place of origin, i.e., Kashmir.

Rare Books and Special Collections ISL178, folio 207a



Case 3b

Writing Implements

“The pen is the ambassador of the mind, its messenger, its furthest reaching tongue, and its best interpreter.”⁶

The most typical scribal accessory was a pen box (*miqlamah*, Pers. *qalamdān*). In the medieval period pen boxes were made of metal (often bronze or silver). In Iran and India in the 18th and 19th centuries, these were replaced by elegantly painted lacquer. Another accessory, the inkwell (*miḥbarah*), usually had a silk or wool wad in the neck to prevent the pen from picking up too much ink.

Alongside the pens inside the pen case there was usually a penknife (*sikkīn*) and a nibbing block (*miqaṭṭah*), used for trimming the point of the nib of the reed pen. The small nibbing block was usually made of ivory or camel bone.

The inks (*midād*, *ḥibr*) were either carbon-based or tannin (iron gall)-based and their quality depended on the right quantity of ingredients used. Iron-gall ink, for instance, was made by mixing pulverized gallnuts (oak apples) with vitriol (obtained from alum) and gum arabic. However, using too much vitriol had disastrous consequences for parchment and paper since the ink could burn the writing surface and destroy the text.

Ink was often kept in solid form and recipes for ink-making were a well guarded secret among scholars and scribes. For this reason, some inks are referred to as the “ink of Ibn Muqlah” (d.940), traditionally the first and greatest Muslim calligrapher,

⁶ Ibn Abī Dāʿūd, quoted by Ibn al-Nadīm (fl.10th century).

or the “ink of Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī” (d. after 1009), famous prose writer and the author of a short treatise on penmanship.

In the process of making ink, camphor or musk was often added as perfume. Aloe was used against flies and worms; myrtle water, to give the ink a greenish hue, and kohl, to give it a shiny effect.

Exhibits

A wooden writing tablet made for Dr. Casey Wood, the founder of McGill's Blacker-Wood Library of Zoology and Ornithology. The tablet shows the Arabic alphabet in its Urdu variety and 10 numerals. The use of tablets in school instruction goes back to Antiquity. Wooden writing tablets are still used in some parts of the Islamic world today. The shape of the wooden tablet with one handle, a modified version of the Roman *tabula ansata*, had a great impact on manuscript decoration.

Rare Books and Special Collections AC202



A lacquer pen box (*qalamdān*) with the inscription, “From the shop (*az dūkān*, thus) of Sayyid (Syed) Turāb, painted by (*bi-qalam*) Riḍā ibn Muḥammad.” The decoration shows a typical combination of flowers and birds. Purchased in Srinagar, Kashmir, 1926.

Rare books and Special Collections 413



A lacquer pen box decorated with an intricate floral design in green, gold and red. Probably Iran, mid 18th century.

Rare Books and Special Collections 419



A nibbing block (*miqattah*), one of the standard scribal tools used for nibbing (cutting the point) of the reed pen (calamus). It was made of ivory in Kashmir, probably in the 19th century.

Rare Books and Special Collections 415



A brass pen tray (with two reed pens) made in Yarkhand (Turkmenistan, Central Asia), ca. 1740.

Rare Books and Special Collections



To a Fledgling Calligrapher



“Let your calamus be medium thick. Do not nib it at a knot, for this would make matters knotty. Do not write with a twisted calamus, or with one with an uneven split. If you cannot afford a Fārisī or Baḥrī calamus and are obliged to use a Nabataean one, select those which tend to have a brown color.

Make your knife sharper than a razor; do not cut anything with it but the calamus, and take very good care of it. Let your nibbing block be of the toughest wood available, so that the point may come out evenly. In cutting your calamus keep to the middle between obliqueness and evenness.

When you write fine letters, hold your calamus even, so that the letters may come out well; when you write large letters, hold it inclined towards the side.”⁷

⁷ Advice given by Ibrāhīm ibn al-‘Abbās to a pupil in his presence. Quoted from Franz Rosenthal’s translation of Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī’s “Epistle on Penmanship”, with slight modifications. Published in *Four Essays on Art and Literature in Islam*. Leiden, 1971, p.42.

A Scribe's Lament

قيل لوراق ما السرور قال **جلود واوراق وحرير** براق و**قلم** مشاق وسئل وراق عن حاله
فقال عيشي اضيق من **محبرة** وجسمي ادق من **مسطرة** وجاهي ارق من **الزجاج**
ووجهي اشد سوادا من **الزاج** وحظي اخفى من **شق القلم** ويدي اضعف من
القصب وطعامي امر من **العفص** وسوء الحال الزق بي من **الصمغ**.

“A scribe was asked, ‘what is pleasure’? He answered; ‘**parchments, papers, shiny ink** and a cleft **reed pen**’. And when asked about his condition, he replied, ‘my livelihood is narrower than an **inkwell**, my body more slender than a **ruler**, my rank (standing) more delicate than **glass**, my face darker than **vitriol**, my lot more concealed than **the slit of a nib**, my hand weaker than a **reed**, my food comes from **gall nuts**, and bad luck clings to me like **gum arabic**.’”⁸

⁸Abd al-Malik al-Tha‘ālibī. *Kitāb khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ* (Beirut, 1966), p.69.

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