

Arabic Calligraphy

الخط العربي

Arabic calligraphy, known in Arabic as خط (khuT) or “line,” is the practice of artistically presenting Arabic script through handwriting. Master calligraphers use a bamboo pen, called a قَلَم (qalam) to combine letters and words to give Arabic script artistic meaning. Calligraphy appears in both religious and secular contexts in many mediums, including architecture, texts, and jewelry, throughout the Arab world. Various styles have emerged over the centuries that serve a multitude of religious, political, social, and cultural functions. A sample of six distinct calligraphy styles are listed here, each writing the Arabic quote, “knowledge of languages is the doorway to wisdom,” in a unique way. Each style of calligraphy is listed in historical order.

معرفة اللغات مدخل إلى الحكمة

Kufic

The term Kufic is an umbrella term covering five or more scripts with a diverse array of aesthetics and history. This example is Abbasid Kufic, a popular style of calligraphy in Qurans produced from the 8th to the 10th centuries in present-day Iraq and Syria. The use of dots above letters was not yet standard, and words could be divided midway to preserve even justification on a rectangular page.

مَعْرِفَةُ اللُّغَاتِ مُدْخِلٌ إِلَى الْحِكْمَةِ

Naskh

Naskh script is one of the classical Six Scripts, codified from the 10th to 13th centuries, and is designed to be clearly legible and written in a small hand. Naskh means “copy” and is most often used for body texts and scribal work, stemming from its original purpose of copying the Quran. It is a fully vocalized script, so every letter’s short vowel is written.

مَعْرِفَةُ اللُّغَاتِ مُدْخِلٌ إِلَى الْحِكْمَةِ

Maghribi

Maghribi script, characterized by long flowing curves and extended horizontals, was developed in North Africa in the 11th century. Maghribi was traditionally written with a round-tip pen, as opposed to an oblique carved chisel-tip pen used farther to the east. The script can be written both at a small size for body text copying and a large size for headings and banners, although there are stylistic differences between the small and the large variants.

مَعْرِفَةُ اللُّغَاتِ مُدْخِلٌ إِلَى الْحِكْمَةِ

Diwan Jaly

Diwani script comes from the word diwan, meaning “sultan’s court.” Diwani was developed during the Ottoman period as a clerical and legislative script and was used for writing decrees and legal proclamations. As a security measure, non-grammatical dots and markings were added between every gap in the calligraphy in order to prevent any retroactive changes or edits to the language.

مَعْرِفَةُ اللُّغَاتِ مُدْخِلٌ إِلَى الْحِكْمَةِ

Thuluth (Jaly)

Thuluth, a calligraphy style dating back to the 10th century, is often considered the most regal and elegant of the classical styles. The word thuluth means “one third,” named because the letters often space their curves at one-third intervals. The script can be presented both as a straight line of legible text or as a تركيب (tarkib), meaning composition, in which the words are designed in circular or rectangular bands of calligraphy.

مَعْرِفَةُ اللُّغَاتِ مُدْخِلٌ إِلَى الْحِكْمَةِ

Faarisi/Talik/Nastaliq

This flowing, unadorned style of calligraphy was developed in Iran in the 13th century. Over the following centuries, its popularity spread through Central and South Asia, Iraq and the Ottoman Empire, where it became the national script of many countries. The script has regional variations as local calligraphers made it their own. In Arabic, this script is known as Faarisi, in Turkish it is called Talik, and Persian and Urdu refer to it as Nastaliq.