

Arabic Calligraphy

As the word both verbal and written is at the heart of Islamic civilisation, so Arabic calligraphy is at the heart of Islamic Art. Islam started with the Divine Revelation of God's words to the Prophet Muhammad (AD 571–632), which formed the Qur'an, Islam's Holy book. And from the very beginning, the Prophet and his followers encouraged the Muslim community to master reading and writing. Caliph 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab – the second caliph after the Prophet's death in AH 11 / AD 632 – used to say: 'The best script is the clearest, and clear script is the best', while Imam 'Ali, the fourth caliph, used to say: 'Good scripting increases the clarity of truth'. This attention to the perfection of writing encouraged excellence in the field of calligraphy. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the first caliphs engaged in collecting and preserving all the Qur'anic Revelations into one definitive book. Scribes were employed for the task, and as the Islamic State expanded beyond Arabia, it became important to supply the regions with definitive and approved copies of the Qur'an. Accuracy in copying the text was paramount; much attention was paid to the quality of the production, to ensure longevity. Attention to these needs and the subsequent introduction of papermaking technology to the Middle East led to the development of manuscript production all over the Islamic world. The Arabisation of the political and administrative systems of the expanding Islamic Empire during the reign of the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan (r. 65–86 / 685–707) had an important influence on the development of Arabic calligraphy. Beyond the Arabic-speaking world, several Islamic regions and peoples began using the Arabic alphabet to write their languages. Persian and Turkish, and later on Urdu, all adapted Arabic calligraphic styles of scripting to their needs and artistic tastes.



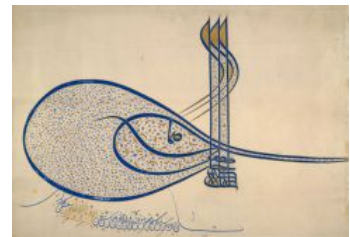
Ceramic bowl

Hegira 6th century / AD 12th century

Almoravid or Almohad

Museum of Mértola

Mértola, Beja, Portugal



Tughra (imperial monogram)

About hegira 956 / AD 1550

Ottoman

The British Museum

London, England, United Kingdom