

THE HEAD-SERIF (*TARWĪS*) AND THE TYPOLOGY OF ARABIC SCRIPTS: PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

Despite recent progress made in the field of Arabic palaeography, especially as regards the early Abbasid period, this field continues to be plagued with the use of incorrect and often contradictory nomenclature. It is not rare to find in the same publication two similar (often identical) looking specimens with two completely different labels. Many recent publications on calligraphy, whether Western or Arabic, Persian or Turkish, present a picture of great confusion not only in nomenclature but also in the description and identification of various Arabic scripts.

In order to illustrate, for example, the problem of script labels, let us take the terms *nash* and *nashī*. Are they interchangeable? Should they be interchangeable? And what about the script called *ijāzah*? Is it the same as *riqā'*? Should the term *ta'liq* be used instead of *nasta'liq* in the Ottoman Turkish context? Or is the appellation *rayḥān* the same as *rayḥānī*, and if so, in which historical period and / or geographical location?

In view of this confusion, some of us may be tempted to abandon the traditional nomenclature altogether and follow the path traced out by F. Déroche by devising a system with a new or modified set of script appellations. And, who knows, perhaps this is what eventually will have to be done. But first a thorough discussion of the extant texts on penmanship and a palaeographic analysis of all calligraphic (formal) scripts has to be conducted.

It goes without saying that the art of calligraphy is a living art. New features often coincide with the old (archaic) ones and all scripts are subject to changes, variations or modifications depending on the region or calligraphic "school" or "tradition" they originated from. Nor is there any doubt that some appellations of scripts vary or change according to historical periods and / or geographical locations. Thus we notice that, for example, the *nash* or *riqā'* of the Mamluk period is very different from the *nash* or *riqā'* as practiced, for example, in 18th century Iran or Turkey and that the Ottoman *dīwānī* is really an adaptation of the Persian chancery script called *ta'liq* [1]. In the same vein, *nash*—*ta'liq* (popularly known as *nasta'liq*), when adopted and practiced by Ottoman calligraphers, is referred to as *ta'liq*. Just as in the later Ottoman period *muḥaqqaq* is often referred to as *rayḥānī* [2].

The script variations also depend on how the reed pen was nibbed (whether straight or obliquely) and on the skill of the calligrapher [3]. Some hands can be more idiosyn-

cratic than others and two different pieces of calligraphy, even when produced by the same calligrapher, may exhibit considerable variations in the execution of the same letters. Furthermore, the execution of the same letter may vary depending on its position within a word. In other words, it may be affected by a neighbouring letter or letters, especially when it forms a ligature. In this case the letter context may be of great importance. For example, when examining the execution of the letter *lām* it may be helpful to view it not just in its initial, isolated and median form but in combination with other letters, e. g. with the *alif* in the definite article *al* or in the ligatures *lām-mīm*, *lām-ḥā'* and *lām-alif* [4].

Naturally, in an analysis of a given script one cannot confine oneself to one palaeographic element. On the contrary, other elements and features have to be taken into consideration. However, their exact nature and role have to be first defined.

It is interesting to note that some of these elements or features were discussed by medieval calligraphers and practitioners of the art, and that their analysis may be as valid to us as it was valid to them. I refer here specifically to the extant Mamluk texts that I briefly presented in two articles published a few years ago in *Manuscripts of the Middle East* [5]. Most of these texts give very detailed descriptions of various letterforms and their appellations. It is clear from these descriptions that certain letterforms were supposed to be used only in certain scripts. In other words the Mamluk calligraphers were bound by certain conventions. Thus, for example, the *alif al-muṣa'arah*, i. e. the letter *alif* with a hairstroke tail (foot) bending leftwards, was a characteristic of *ṭhuluth* and *tawqī'*, while the *lām-alif al-warrāqīyah*, i. e. the *lām-alif* ligature with a triangular base, was used exclusively in the *muḥaqqaq* family of scripts. Similarly, flat, tapered descenders were more characteristic of *muḥaqqaq*, *maṣāḥif* and *rayḥān*, whereas those that curved upwards were to be found mostly in the *ṭhuluth*, *tawqī'* and *riqā'* scripts. Other features discussed by Mamluk authors are *tams*, that is "blinding" or closing of the counters of such letters as *ṣād*, *tā'*, 'ayn, *fā'*, *qāf*, *mīm*, *hā'* and *wāw*, and *tarwīs*, that is, properly speaking, a seriffed head on a number of letters. While the use of *tams* is connected with the size of the script (the smaller the script the greater the possibility of closing the counters), the employment of *tarwīs* is dictated by other considerations.