
The Digital Library of Inscriptions and Calligraphies

Calligraphy Center

Digital publications have become one of the means adopted by the world today for preserving cultural and historical heritages. To this end, the BA Calligraphy Center has established an electronic project which documents and publishes different ancient inscriptions. This project is called 'The Digital Library for Inscriptions and Calligraphy'. It comes at the top of the goals of the Calligraphy Center, which has taken upon itself the publication of different calligraphy styles and inscriptions, especially those left behind by the different languages that influenced Egypt. The center makes all of this available to scientists, scholars, and amateurs in the form of a simple digital content on the website of the center.

The library is considered a digital archive for the writings and inscriptions on buildings and monuments throughout the ages. These inscriptions are displayed on the website of the Digital Library for Inscriptions and Calligraphy in digital form, which includes photographs and a brief description of these inscriptions.

The Digital Library for Calligraphy and Inscription launched 1500 inscriptions on 13 August, and less than one year later, thanks to the efforts of the Calligraphy Center research team, this number now exceed 4000 inscriptions, all available for free.

The BA staff who are carrying out this project have made sure that the website of the Digital Library for Inscriptions and Calligraphy has a simple design and is easy to use, so as to enable the largest number of researchers to benefit from the ancient inscription treasures, and to attain abundant



pictures and references for each inscription. Users can browse easily through the inscriptions on the Digital Library for Inscriptions and Calligraphy, as they are categorized according to the original language of the inscription, the classification and type of the monument. Users can also find the required inscription by using an advanced search which enables them to search using the number of the inscription, or the place where it is kept, or the place where it was found, or the historical period to which it belongs. In this way, the researcher can find everything related to the inscription: high-resolution

pictures, inscription analyses, information and a brief description of the monument, in addition to a translation of the inscription.

In its initial stage, the project began with the documentation of the calligraphies of the group of languages that comprises the ancient Egyptian language, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Greek. This is in addition to another group of various calligraphies, namely, the Thamudic, the Nabataean, and the Musnad. As the documentation of the calligraphy of each group of languages is completed, work begins on a new group of languages.

The first language among this group of calligraphies is the ancient Egyptian language. This language of the ancient Egyptians passed through several stages, each of which had a different form of writing. It started with the Hieroglyphic calligraphy, which was then simplified into the Hieratic (which literally means: the priestly calligraphy). After that came the Demotic which was a very short form of writing used for the purposes of daily life. Finally, the Coptic calligraphy appeared, it was a result of the Hellenic civilization and a mixture of the Greek and Demotic calligraphies.

Each of these four calligraphies, which merged under the umbrella of the ancient Egyptian language, has left many monuments and artifacts, which carry ancient engravings reflecting the development of the ancient Egyptian language.



Some of the most memorable of these monuments are: the funereal collection of king Tutankhamen, with its mausoleums, statues, and royal slogans, Hatchepsut's obelisk at El-Karnak and Ramses II's obelisk, the cemetery of Nefertari that is considered the most famous and beautiful of the cemeteries at the Valley of the Queens, and a set of literary texts like the texts of King Unas' pyramids, and royal paintings like the painting of Merenptah that is mistakenly known as the painting of Israel. All this is in addition to the Coptic icons preserved at the Coptic museum in Cairo.

The second language, no less important than the ancient Egyptian language, is Arabic, the language of the holy Koran which is known as the language of the letter 'ض daad' because it is the only language where this letter is found. Many forms of Arabic calligraphy have appeared in numerous ancient engravings, the most important of which are



the Kufic and the Naskh calligraphies. Moreover, there are also the Thuluth, Ijaza, and Persian styles as well as other Arabic calligraphy styles. The Arabic calligraphy collection is distinguished by its richness and variety. For example, the digital library has the splendid calligraphies of Mohamed Ali's Mosque at the citadel which is resplendent with a huge amount of ancient writings in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. There are also ancient calligraphies at the fountain of Om Abbas, which is considered one of the most important fountains that show calligraphies in Arabic and Turkish, dating back to the age of the Ottoman Empire in Cairo. It is also worth mentioning that the calligraphies of Mohamed Ali's Mosque at the citadel and those of the fountain of Om Abbas are being published for the first time through the Digital Library for Calligraphy and Inscriptions.

The centre for calligraphy has also taken it upon itself to document the calligraphies of ancient mosques in Alexandria and Rosetta. One of the most important mosques in Alexandria is El-Boseiry Mosque that carries ancient calligraphies including the famous 'Nahg El-Borda' poem in praise of the prophet Mohammed (PBUH). Similarly, two of the most important mosques in Rosetta are the mosques of Domeksis and El-Abbassy. In addition, the calligraphy of many other Islamic buildings has been published by the Digital Library.

The digital library's interest in documenting Arabic calligraphy has not only been confined to the calligraphies that were documented in Egypt, but it has also been interested in calligraphies outside Egypt. Some of these calligraphies are: the calligraphies of the palaces of Alhambra, the splendors of the Islamic civilization in Andalusia, and the group of tombstones of Saada cemetery in Yemen. This cemetery, with its dated tombstones that are ornamented with rich Islamic engravings, is considered one of Islamic

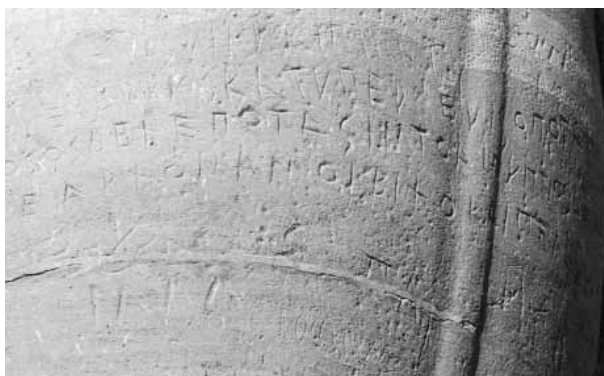


history's scriptures for the city. The centre for calligraphy has also documented the most important Arabic calligraphies engraved in the Great Mosque in the Algerian Republic in Telmcen and the Great Mosque in Constantinople; as well as a group of tombstones in the museum of Telmcen.

The digital library has also documented the whole tombstone collection of the Mo'alaat cemetery in Mecca, which contains the bodies of some of the eminent companions of the prophet, and has a great number of tombstones that reflect the development of the kufic calligraphy up to the end of the Ayyubid age.

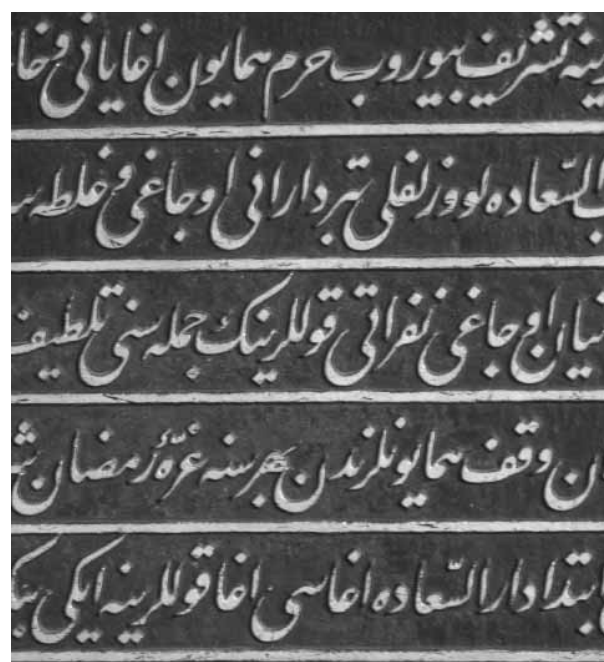
Islamic coins are considered some of the most important documents that provide us with true and accurate information that help us study Islamic history from all aspects. From that respect, the calligraphies of a group of Islamic dinars from Jeddah in Saudi Arabia have been published among the Arabic calligraphies in the digital library.

The third language, Greek, represents an important stage of Egyptian history. In this stage the Greek civilization mixed with the Egyptian to produce a new blend that manifested itself in the Hellenistic civilization after the Greek language had become the official language of the country. This trend started to appear with the coming of Alexander the Great to Egypt and his establishment of its new



capital, Alexandria. That is why the Digital Library for Calligraphy has ancient Greek calligraphy in Alexandria, such as the ancient calligraphy inscribed on Diocletian's Pillar -which is known as the Pompey's Pillar-the Foundation plaques of the Serapeum Temple of Alexandria, the ancient calligraphy of El-Rass El-Soda temple, the area of Kom El-Shoafa, and the area of Kom El-Dekka. The centre also published a new collection, which was never published before, of Ptolemaic currencies illustrating the history of the Ptolemaic family in Egypt. The discovery of the Rosetta Stone also caused the decoding of the symbols of the ancient Egyptian language, which was a golden key to understanding many sides of the ancient Egyptian civilization. The stone has been documented in three types of calligraphies. These are: the Hieroglyphic, the Demotic, and the Greek. That is why the digital library published the whole text and the translation of the Greek and Demotic texts.

The Turkish language, the language of the Ottoman Empire, illustrates the aesthetics of the Arabic calligraphy in which it was written, as it has been greatly influenced by the Arabic and Persian languages. The Islamic buildings in Egypt abound with Turkish inscriptions, the most memorable of which is memorial inscription of the Bulaq Press, the first official governmental printing press ever, established in Egypt in the age of Mohamed Ali. This inscription has been published exclusively by the



Digital Library for Calligraphy and Inscriptions.

The digital library also includes Persian calligraphy among a collection of important Persian manuscripts from the museum of Islamic art in Malaysia. The library publishes this collection exclusively in the guide to Rhythm and Verses exhibition 'Angham wa Ayat', which has chosen the BA Calligraphy Centre to be its partner in success.

The last section of the library is devoted to a display of a collection of ancient Arabic calligraphies. These are the Musnad, the Nabataean, and the Thamudic calligraphies. This section includes stone engravings documented in these calligraphy styles, and they have been found in Yemen, the Nabataean city of Hajar, Jebba in Ha'il, and the area of Al-Jawf in Saudi Arabia.

This project is indeed befitting of the ancient civilization and history of Egypt. It deserves all the care and the attention of the researchers and specialists in the field of writings and calligraphy worldwide. It also deserves to be part of the BA's series of achievements in documenting the past using the technology of the modern age.