

Faux Hands for Calligraphy

Imitating Non-European Script

THL Helena Sibylla – helenasibylla@gmail.com

As scribes in the SCA, we're all familiar with a variety of European scripts from the Middle Ages. We've probably all dabbled at least a bit with calligraphic hands like Uncial, Carolingian Minuscule, Early Gothic, or Batarde. While many people in the SCA choose to portray European personas, there are an increasing number of people exploring non-European areas such as Islam and China. Beyond that, there are other scripts that exist around the main core of European writing that fit other personas such as Greek or Norse.

If you have a scroll assignment for a person where a medieval European hand just won't be suitable, there are a couple of options. One is to plug your text into a translation program and then writing in the original language. However, this runs the risk of someone who actually knows the language finding unintentional errors created by the translation software, which doesn't always understand the quirks and idioms found in non-English languages. Creating a script with the look of a foreign hand that fits the culture of the recipient's persona has the advantage of allowing the scribe to still write in English while creating a visual effect that is dramatically different from the typical SCA scroll.

In addition to the examples provided here, I strongly recommend that you spend some time researching the script of the culture you're planning to emulate. You will want to consider issues of punctuation and accent marks, as well as decorative letters, and upper and lower cases (if they are used). Look at real examples of script from the time and culture you're working with so you can get a feel for some of these details and the overall look of the way the script is used. Consider that script is often found on items other than manuscripts – ceramics, textiles, and carved inscriptions can also provide good examples of how scripts are used.

The following pages provide some examples of faux script alphabets along with some tips to accompany each language.

Please note: None of the examples presented here were made by me! With the exception of the faux Asian hand, all of the examples come from the An Tir College of Scribes Award Charter Handbook (<http://scribes.antir.sca.org/Scribes/CharterGuidebook.pdf>). The Asian hand was provided to me by another scribe whose name I sadly did not record.

Arabic

Classical written Arabic is based on the Kufic script used to write the earliest versions of the Qur'an. Traditionally, calligraphy has been highly valued in Islamic society because of this relationship – the appearance the script in the Qur'an was meant to look as beautiful to the eye as the meaning of the words were to the reader.

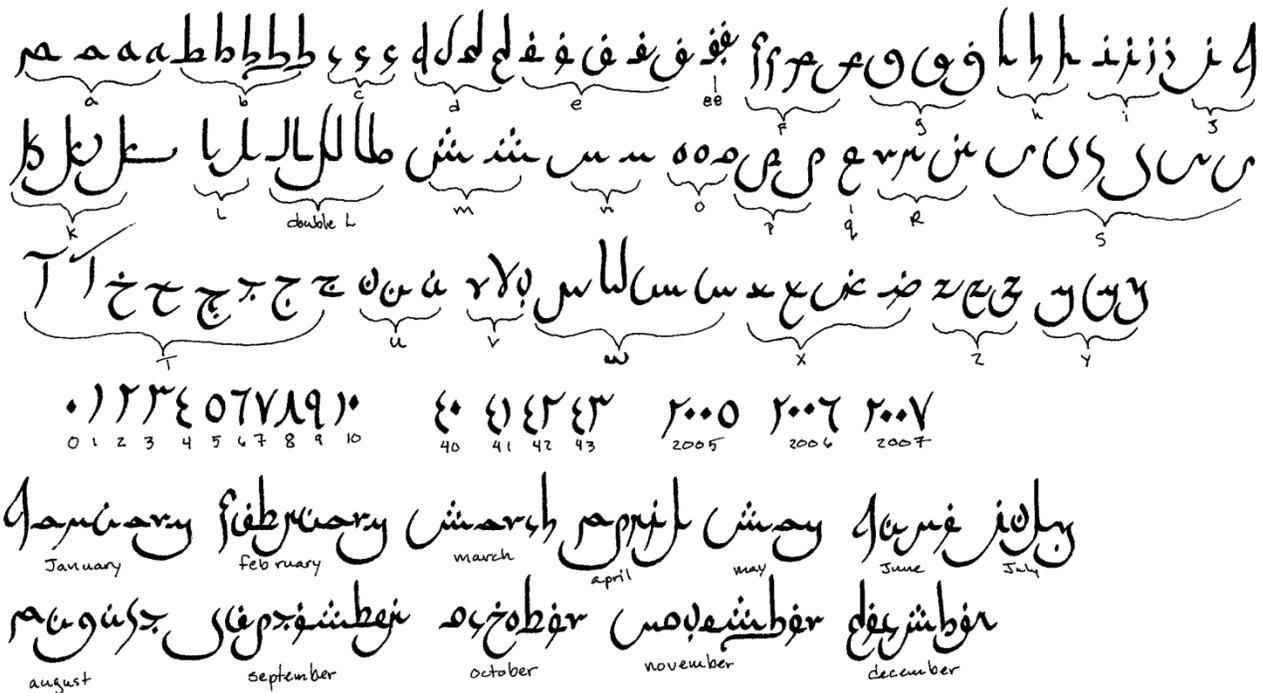
- Written from right to left
- No capitals
- Traditionally written without vowels – words are constructed of consonants with diacritical marks to indicate vowel sounds and the context in which the word is found will indicate meaning
- Letters are often linked together
- Pre-modern written Arabic did not use punctuation!

For a selection of manuscripts written in Arabic, see:

<http://www.library.yale.edu/neareast/exhibitions/exhibit20071.html>

Pseudo Arabic Ductus

*Compiled by Mistress Katarin von dem Drachen
Based on contributions of Mahee of Acre & an Atlantiian scribal link*

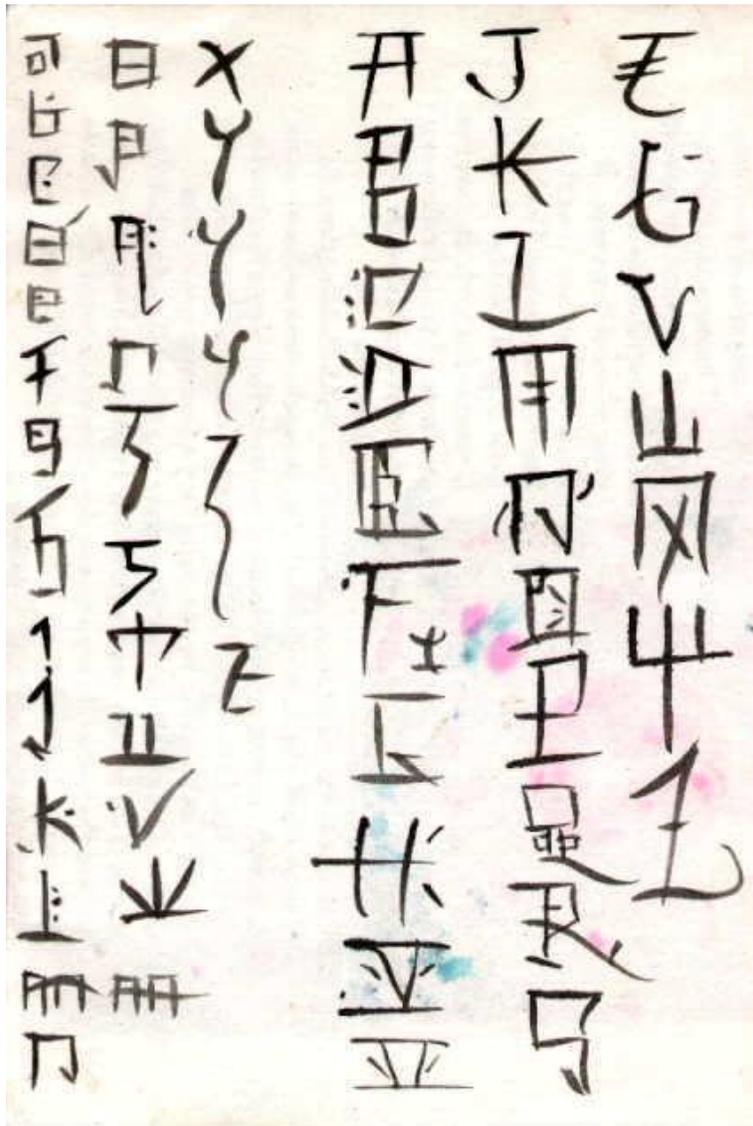


Chinese or Japanese

Traditional Japanese uses the system of Kanji characters imported from China around the 1st century AD. While neither Chinese nor Japanese documents typically combined text with illustration, both regions have a long tradition of artworks that do use both pictures and writing. As with Arabic, calligraphy was a highly valued skill in both China and Japan since it was often seen in conjunction with images in artistic settings.

- Typically written from right to left in vertical columns
- Small blocks of text within a larger area are common when associated with illustration
- Characters are blocky in shape
- Before the 20th century, written without punctuation!

Chinese paintings with calligraphy: <http://www.chinaonlinemuseum.com/painting.php>



Futhark (Runes)

Runic alphabets predate the introduction of Christianity in Northern Europe, particularly in the Scandinavian regions. Usually found as inscriptions on hard surfaces such as stone or metal, though there are a few manuscript examples.

- Usually written from left to right (but not always!)
- No distinction between upper and lower case
- Limited spacing between words
- Punctuation – colon (:), semicolon (;) marks set midlevel were often used to separate words

The *Codex Runicus*, written around 1300: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Runicus

Elder Futhark

Germanic
2nd to 8th centuries CE

Younger Futhark

Scandinavian - long branch
8th to 12th centuries CE

A B C^(soft) C^(hard) D E F^(soft) F^(hard) G H I
 ƿ ʀ ʁ ʕ ʒ ʛ ʝ ʞ ʟ ʠ ʡ

A B C^(soft) C^(hard) D E F^(soft) F^(hard) G H I
 ʰ ʱ ʲ ʳ ʴ ʵ ʶ ʷ ʸ ʹ ʺ

J K L M N O^(long) O^(short) P Q R S
 ʦ ʧ ʨ ʤ ʥ ʦ ʧ ʨ ʤ ʥ

J K L M N O^(long) O^(short) P Q R S
 ʦ ʧ ʨ ʤ ʥ ʦ ʧ ʨ ʤ ʥ

T U V W X Y Z TH NG
 ʦ ʧ ʨ ʤ ʥ ʦ ʧ ʨ ʤ ʥ

T U V W X Y Z TH NG
 ʦ ʧ ʨ ʤ ʥ ʦ ʧ ʨ ʤ ʥ