INVESTIGATION OF THE EDUCATION AND PRACTICE OF CALLIGRAPHY IN SAUDI ARABIA

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the education and practice of calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia. The study provides recommendations for improvement based upon analysis of the collected data. These recommendations are consistent with the country's own religion, objectives, industry, economy, and regulations. The study has three objectives:

A. To identify current difficulties facing calligraphers in Saudi Arabia, and their causes and origins.

B. To examine the beliefs and attitudes of contemporary Saudi calligraphers toward modifying Arabic calligraphy for commercial industrial use.

C. To gather insights and opinions of professional Saudi calligraphers on improving the education and profession of calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia.

Qualitative case study methodology is used for the investigation of this study. Participants in this study consisted of nine Saudi professional calligraphers. These participants were selected for their involvement and experience in the education and practice of calligraphy in the country.

Data for the study were collected during the Summer and Fall of 2002 in Riyadh, the largest and most important industrial, commercial, educational, and cultural city in Saudi Arabia. Data were triangulated using four methods of data collection: semi-structured interviews, follow-up questionnaires, field notes, and public documents.
Interviews, conducted with Saudi professional calligraphers, constitute the main source of data for the study. Additional data came from the participants’ responses to follow-up questionnaires developed specifically to obtain answers to new questions raised after the initial interview data had been analyzed. In addition, field notes were taken during a meeting with a member of the Arabic Calligraphy Organization in Alqateef City (ACOAC) and during a visit to Alka-teb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy (AIIAC). Public documents were also collected during those visits.

Data were analyzed using two methods. Global analysis was used as a practical method for preparing data for other analytic procedures. Then, data were analyzed using content analysis.

Findings revealed participants’ dissatisfaction with calligraphy and graphic design education in Saudi Arabia. They emphasized the importance of improving current Art Education and calligraphy education in public schools. They also expressed their desire for establishment of calligraphy, graphic design, and Fine Art schools for Saudi industry.
DEDICATION

To my mother, whose love is deeply missed

And

To my father, who believes in me always
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Gorgianna Short, my advisor and dissertation chair for her guidance and support. I am also thankful to my committee members Dr. Arthur Efland and Christine Ballengee-Morris for their encouragement and insights.

I would like to thank all the participants in this study, without their cooperation, this research project could not have been completed. I am grateful to my brother Saad Al-Zeyad for his generosity and support. My appreciation also goes to Jennifer Tung for her copy-editing and to all my friends and professors at the Ohio State University.
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Major Field: Art Education
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

Brief History of Saudi Arabia and its Society

Saudi Arabia is located in southwest Asia with an estimated population of 16 million people and considered the heart of the Islamic world. Islam, one of the world’s major revelation religions, was introduced in the seventh century by Prophet Mohammed (570-632 A.D.) in Makkah (a major city in Saudi Arabia). “Saudi society is… traditional [and] conservative, … believing in one God and one religion… Islam rules pervade daily life activities, education, and the law” (Alghamedy, 1986, p. 1). The National Constitution and educational policy of this nation is based upon the Holy Qur’an (Koran) and the Prophet Mohammed's tradition, “saying and doing” (Al-Zahrani, 1988, p. 17).

Before the discovery of oil in 1938, Saudi Arabia was considered a poor underdeveloped country. However, when the Saudi government began exporting oil in 1947, many changes occurred in the economic status of the nation. Now, Saudi Arabia is considered a wealthy rapidly growing industrial country.
Arabic Calligraphy and Islamic Culture

Since the birth of Islam in the seventh century, Arabic calligraphy has been the highest form of artistic expression in Arabic and Islamic countries (see Appendix A). Calligraphy is also considered a holy practice because it is the tool used for writing the Qur'an, holy book of Islam. Huda AbiFarès, Associate Professor of visual communication at the American University in Dubai, United Arabic Emirates, explains “for Arabs, … calligraphy as means of communication [is considered] second in importance to the attention given to writing and keeping of the Koran [Qur’an]. With time, calligraphy came to be a holy practice due to its religious connotation” (2002, on line). Further, according to Alnajdi (2001) “the identity of Islamic culture is expressed perfectly through the traditional forms of Arabic calligraphy, which effectively promote the inherited beliefs and traditions of Muslims and Arabs” (p. 40).

Religious beliefs of Islam prohibit the making of figurative art (e.g., human beings and animals). Unable to use figures of any kind, Muslim artists began to create new art forms to express their thoughts and feelings as early as the eighth century. These new art forms, Arabic calligraphy and Arabesque, have created the unique and distinctive characteristics of what we now call Islamic Art (see Appendices A and B).

Arabesques are decorative designs or patterns composed of geometric or plantlike elements. Dr. Linda Komaroff (2002), curator of Islamic Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, explains that the complexity of Arabesque creates the impression of “unending repetition, which is believed by some to be an inducement to contemplate the infinite nature of God” (on line).
Moreover, Arabic calligraphy and Arabesque have formed a unique style that reflects the ideal, abstract, and intellectual concepts of Islam.

The relationship between… [calligraphy] and Arabesque… which is the geometric underlying structures behind both, strongly reflect the love and fascination of the Arabs with mathematics and geometry. These have come to represent symbolically deep spiritual concepts through which even the whole incarnation could be explained (AbiFarès, 2002, on line).

Arabesque has been widely used as a decorative element or motive applied on two and three-dimensional surfaces (see Appendix C). Combining calligraphy with arabesque is seen in numerous two dimensional Islamic artworks (see Appendix D) and has led to advancements in other arts such as ceramics, architectural ornament, metal and woodwork.

**Arabic Calligraphy and Industry**

Since the introduction of the printing press in Arab countries, calligraphers have been called upon to create Arabic letterforms suitable for printing press technology. However, conversion of the handwritten form to print typeface has proven problematic. Letterforms and typefaces created for the printing press and computer fail to achieve the elegant appearance of traditional calligraphy.

**Problems associated with creating Arabic digital typefaces.** Traditional typefaces are more suitable for relatively small size type. However, typefaces created specifically for display purposes (e.g., commercial art, television, and advertisements) are insufficient in number and quality.

The challenge of re-creating the elegant appearance of traditional calligraphy in digital typefaces for the printing press and computer has been of great concern to type designers and software programmers in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries (Al-
Hawass & Al-Zeyad, 2000, personal communication). Arabic type designers continually struggle to create suitable typefaces for advertisement. Alnajdi (2001) explains:

Some attempts have been made to modernize Arabic calligraphy for computer design [and commercial art], yet it still has the same classical appearance [structure], which does not fit the contemporary look of commercial advertising, illustration, and artwork created on the computer by graphic designers and digital artists. Simply put, the use of classical Arabic script for text in graphic designs tends to clash with the contemporary styles of visual presentation (p. 29).

Further, “Arabic fonts available on the market often fail to have a unique visual or functional character [need for industrial and commercial practices]” (AbiFarès, 2001, online). The mediocre nature of most available Arabic typefaces is “entirely unacceptable and discouraging for the young generation of graphic designers” (AbiFarès, 2002, online).

**Industrial need for contemporary typefaces.** Requirements of current Saudi industry, including advertising, graphic design and desktop publishing, demand enhanced quality of typefaces. One way to meet these requirements is to improve the way new generation of calligraphers and graphic designers are educated in Saudi Arabia. However, educational changes in the way calligraphers and graphic designers are taught can create artistic and technical problems current calligraphy and graphic design instructors are unqualified to meet. The lack of certified calligraphy and graphic design instructors in Saudi Arabia since is due to the absence of schools for teaching graphic design and calligraphy.

Moreover, modifying Arabic calligraphy to meet contemporary aesthetic preferences and technically altering Arabic letterforms to meet current industrial requirements also raises critical concerns about maintaining the identity of Islamic and
Arabic cultures and traditions. Since “traditional Arabic calligraphy was developed within a religious context to serve religious and cultural beliefs”, conservative designers and calligraphers may not support modernizing the education and practice of Arabic calligraphy (Alnajdi, 2001, p. 46).

**Gradual modification of traditional calligraphy in industry.** As a graphic designer myself, I recognize the struggle traditional calligraphers have when attempting to work within constraints posed by the commercial and graphic design industry in Saudi Arabia. For example, Mohammed Al-Zeyad, who graduated “With Excellence” from the Calligraphy Institute in Riyadh in the late 1970s, and two Egyptian calligraphers employed at the Al-Zeyad Advertising Company initially worked in the traditional calligraphic style. However, after few years, both Mohammed and the Egyptian calligraphers found clients favored a more modern calligraphic style for outdoor signs and logos. They turned to Saad Al-Zeyad, a calligrapher using a more modern approach. Soon most, if not all clients, began to firmly request Saad for their product designs rather than Mohammed or the Egyptian calligraphers. Eventually, Mohammed was relegated to a managerial position and the Egyptian calligraphers were assigned only small and less important design work.

**Relationship of Calligraphy and Graphic Design Education to Industry**

Both Mohammed and the Egyptian designers studied calligraphy in traditional schools where they learned by copying fine calligraphy samples. They were taught to maintain the traditional shapes and measurements of all letterforms. In contrast, Saad learned calligraphy in a very casual way. Saad, during the first three years of working at
Al-Zeyad Advertising Company, noticed that traditional Arabic calligraphy, when used in very large outdoor signs, did not seem attractive and was difficult to read from distance.

Saad began to make some adjustments to traditional letterforms on his own. These changes were appreciated by the company's clients but not by traditional calligraphers. Still, Saad kept adjusting the letterforms more and more until his style resulted in new typefaces.

Saad's new typefaces became extremely popular in the city and in the country. Saad's (now) twenty-two years of experience in commercial art along with his creation of several contemporary calligraphy styles have made him one of the most well known contemporary calligraphers and sign designers in Saudi Arabia. The Al-Zeyad Advertising Company, for which he works, has become a leading advertising company in the country. Designs from this company now inspire Arabic calligraphers and designers throughout Saudi Arabia. Several major advertising companies in Saudi Arabia imitate Saad's modern calligraphy and design styles. Imitation of Saad's style by these companies attests to the popularity of his designs.

However, Saad still faces some problems when designing logos and backgrounds for signs in print. Designing logos or posters requires more than innovative calligraphy. It requires a strong graphic design background, knowledge of computer technology, and graphic software, which most calligraphers do not have. Such knowledge and background in graphic design have become essential for today’s calligraphers working in advertising profession.
Calligraphy and Art Education in Saudi Arabia

Calligraphy institutions. An educational institution (The Institute of Calligraphy) was established in mid 1970s to teach calligraphy. The curriculum consisted of four years of studying calligraphy in the traditional way. Many students graduating from this program became professional calligraphers and designers. However, in the late 1980s, the Institute of Calligraphy was closed for various of reasons that do not pertain to this study.

In the early 1990’s, a small private school was founded in Riyadh to teach calligraphy. Currently, this school is the only school in the country providing calligraphy training. Calligraphy is taught in a traditional way. The school provides classes on beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels for students. Students learn by copying a teacher's example and by maintaining the same measurements and shapes of letterforms that were created hundreds of years ago. Classes run from one to six months in length. After finishing the program, students do not get a degree but rather a “Letter of Completion”.

K-12 education in the arts. The Saudi government provides free education for all students in elementary, junior high, high school, and university settings. Art Education was introduced into public schools in the early 1950s. However, “the art education curriculum guideline developed by the Ministry of Education (1974) states that the study of the human figure and making of statues of any kind of being shall not be included in the teaching activities of art education” (Alghamedy, 1986, p. 12).

Students in elementary and junior high school receive approximately two hours of Art Education per week. Art Education classes are taught by art specialists, but the non-
figurative curriculum is limited to drawing, painting, and handwork. Students receive a progress grade at the end of the term. At the present time, Art Education classes are not available in high school.

Calligraphy is considered separate from Art Education curriculum. Students at elementary and junior high schools receive one hour of calligraphy education per week. Usually, art or reading instructors teach calligraphy classes. Small handbooks containing some fine calligraphy artworks are provided for students to copy. All students receive progress grades in calligraphy class just as they do in Art Education. Just as in Art Education, students pass to next grade level regardless of their progress grades in calligraphy class.

University education in the arts. No Fine Art schools of any kind exist in Saudi Arabia. Fine Arts classes can only be found in Departments of Art Education at colleges and universities. But even in colleges and universities, there are no Fine Arts majors.

Only a few Art Education Departments exist in major universities in Saudi Arabia. The oldest Art Education Department was established in 1974 at King Saud University in Riyadh. Another Art Education Department was founded in May, 1976 at Umm Al-Qura University in Makkah. Both Departments offer four-year programs and students graduate with a Bachelor’s Degree in Art Education.

Art Education programs also exist at Junior Colleges in other cities. These programs are small in size and focus more on educational aspects than art theories and art making. These Art Education programs offer Bachelor Degrees in Education with specialty in Art Education.
The primary mission of Art Education programs in Saudi Arabia is to prepare students to become art teachers. Since there are no Fine Art schools or university programs offering Fine Art Degrees, students interested in Fine Art careers must also enroll in Art Education programs hoping whatever studio knowledge and skills they learn will assist them becoming successful artists or designers. These Fine Art students focus on one art division or specialty (e.g., painting, graphic design, printmaking) during their study and expect to be proficient at it when they graduate. Thus, public expectations of Art Education programs and understanding about how creative artists are educated are far from the reality and mission of Art Education programs. The existing difference between the mission of Art Education programs and public expectations has created confusion about the purpose and function of Art Education programs in Saudi society.

The Department of Art Education is part of the College of Education at King Saud University. The primary objective of the Art Education Department is to prepare art teachers and the second objective is to produce artists. Currently, more than 100 students are enrolled in the Bachelor of Art Education Degree. These students intend to become art teachers in public schools after they graduate. The Art Education Department offers classes in Western and Islamic art history, Islamic art, art education theories, aesthetics, and studio production. However, Alghamdy (1986) explains that:

Unlike most art education programs for teacher preparation, all studio courses are designed and taught by the art education faculty members. Therefore, there is no clear distinction between art [Fine Art] and art education areas since all courses to be taken in the program are being taught by the same faculty who have no professional background in studio art (pp. 10-11).
Graphic design classes are also taught by Art Education professors who have little or no studio background in design or computer graphics. Since professors lack formal training in graphic design skills, their students are more likely to receive an unsatisfactory or low quality graphic design education. For example, students in graphic design classes do not use standard graphic design tools and materials, substituting standard drafting and painting tools from fine Art. For the same reason, professors seldom avail themselves or their students with the high quality technology found in the Department's computer lab. Art education professors who lack sufficient background and knowledge in graphic design have problems constructing the graphic design curriculum. The current graphic design curriculum is no different from that of Art Education. It consists only of drawing and painting exercises rather than focusing on graphic design theory and skills.

After the establishment of the computer lab in the Art Education Department at King Saud University, students in graphic design classes began experimenting with graphic software without productive results. For example, since the majority of students lack understanding of the principles of design (e.g., balance, harmony, tension, rhythm, and contrast), they tend to scan images and extensively overlap them using Adobe Photoshop. Overlapping images not only produce clutter and unpleasant design composition but also deliver an unclear message.

Further, generally speaking, the graphic design curriculum in the Art Education Department at King Saud University lacks focus, content, textbooks, and type of assignments appropriate to the field of graphic design. Consideration and attention should
be given to all these problems if graphic design curriculum is to be improved and graduating students are to be prepared for the current job market.

**Graphic design education in Saudi universities.** Publication and advertising for television, World Wide Web, and print media require Saudi designers to create appropriate graphics for today’s competitive industries. However, the current Art Education curricula in Saudi Arabia permit only a small number of classes for Fine Artists and Designers. Lack of depth and breadth in coursework does not allow enough time for Fine Art and Design students to attain a deep understanding of studio techniques or allow sufficient practice time.

For example, available studio classes in the Art Education Department at King Saud University (KSU) include painting, drawing, printmaking, ceramic, and graphic design. The Art Education Department offers only two classes in graphic design. Each graphic design class is one semester in length. Since only two courses are offered, students are led to believe they have learned all there is to know about Graphic Design, and are ready to enter the workplace as graphic designers. However, upon graduation, they soon learn they can not compete for graphic design jobs with Egyptians, Syrians, and Lebanese whose educational background in graphic design far exceeds their own.

**Problems of educating future graphic designers.** Adding more studio-based courses to accommodate needs of calligraphy and graphic design students in universities is difficult under present circumstances. Opening a traditional Western-style Fine Art school in the near future is not possible since the country's official religion prohibits representation of all living beings.
A different solution is required to meet the needs of students interested in graphic
design and commercial art. It is of interest therefore to consider how schools for teaching
graphic design and commercial art might be established and institutionalized to meet the
needs of Saudi society and industry without emulating the instructional design models of
other countries.

**Foreign Designers in Saudi Arabia and Problems of Culture**

Since graphic design students and calligraphers in Saudi Arabia receive such
meager education, Saudi businesses must look elsewhere for well-educated and
experienced designers and calligraphers. Currently, nearly all the graphic design and
commercial art in Saudi Arabia is produced by individuals from Egypt, Syria, and
Lebanon. However few, if any, foreign designers fully understand the culture, tradition,
and needs of Saudi Arabia. Because these foreign designers have been raised in other
countries, they (knowingly or not) tend to incorporate elements from their home culture
into graphic design products created for Saudi industry. Foreign graphic designers are not
aware that they do not understand the negative effects their artworks may have on Saudi
consumers' beliefs and attitudes. These commercial artists may not be aware that their
advertisements may encourage smoking or aggressive attitudes particularly in females
and teenagers. Mixing or combining elements from different cultures without thoughtful
reasons is usually not appreciated in commercial art anywhere in the world. Most
industrial societies need graphic and commercial artworks that accurately portray that
society’s culture and traditions.
Statement of the Problem

To date, no published research studies have investigated calligraphy education and practice in Saudi Arabia. Further, there is a need for gathering beliefs and insights of professional Saudi calligraphers on various issues related to calligraphy to build a solid base of information for future research. Purpose of this study is to respond to these needs.

The study has three objectives:

A. To identify current difficulties facing calligraphers and graphic designers in Saudi Arabia, their causes and origins

B. To examine the beliefs and attitudes of contemporary Saudi calligraphers and graphic designers toward modifying Arabic calligraphy for commercial industry use.

C. To gather insights and opinions of professional Saudi calligraphers and graphic designers about improving the education and profession of calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia.

This study answers the following six research questions:

1. What common artistic and technical problems do calligraphers and graphic designers encounter in Saudi Arabia?

2. What beliefs and attitudes do contemporary Saudi calligraphers and graphic designers have toward modifying Arabic calligraphy?

3. What cultural constraints limit the modification of Arabic calligraphy and typography for contemporary commercial use?

4. What artistic constraints limit the modification of Arabic calligraphy and typography for contemporary commercial use?

5. What is the present situation of calligraphy and graphic design education in Saudi Arabia?

6. What are the opinions and suggestions of professional Saudi calligraphers about improving the education and profession of calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia?
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate calligraphy practice and education in Saudi Arabia. It will identify the current difficulties facing calligraphers and graphic designers in their professions. The study will also gather opinions of professional Saudi calligraphers regarding modifying traditional calligraphy styles to better accommodate today’s communication practices. Further, this study will provide recommendations and suggestions for improving the education and practice of calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia based upon analysis of data collected from the participants, documents, and the review of related literature.

Significance of the Study

This research is the first ever to be done on the status of Arabic calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia. It forms the basis data upon which other researchers, graphic designers, and calligrapher can build.

Saudi Arabia, a rich and fast grown industrial country, is facing a competition in the international market. Visual presentation of any product is an essential component for success in today's international market. The opportunities for Saudi products to be competitive can be strengthened by enhancing the visual presentation of products. To insure high quality visual presentation of Saudi products, proficient and skillful type designers, calligraphers, graphic designers, and commercial artists are greatly needed. Advancement in the education and practice of calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia will certainly produce more effective and qualified type designers and graphic designers for the country’s industry which, in future, will empower its economy.
Initially, this study will develop recommendations and suggestions for improving the status of education and practice of Arabic calligraphy and typography in Saudi Arabia. Findings of this study may be useful in identifying the most effective approaches for improving the teaching of calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia. Since the study will be carried out in Saudi Arabia, recommendations and approaches will be consistent with the country's own religion, objectives, industry, economy, and regulations.

The study will also provide an understanding of the perspectives of practicing Saudi professionals on the issues investigated. Insights gained can assist future efforts to develop a government policy for teaching Arabic calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia. The study, when published, also can draw public and government attention to the importance and need to establish graphic design schools in the country. The study can also assist decision-makers in creating more effective educational policies regarding commercial art and calligraphy. Art educators and curriculum developers in Saudi Arabia may find the study a useful resource and inspiration when developing graphic design curricula.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter, several issues related to Arabic calligraphy and type design are discussed. These issues are arranged into four main sections. The first section is devoted to discussing the development of Arabic calligraphy and type design over the past fifty years. The second section is a brief comparison between Arab nations and Far East countries regarding subjects related to the art of calligraphy. These issues include modern calligraphy, education, associations and exhibitions, technology, and publications.

The third section focuses on the issue of representation in calligraphy and typefaces. It discusses cultural identity, semiotics (theory of signs), and meaning and interpretation of calligraphy and type design. The fourth section explores the cultural significance and role of calligraphy in Arabic society. The last section discusses issues of change in calligraphy as a social practice and a communication tool.

Development of Arabic Calligraphy and Type Design Since 1950s

The development of calligraphy in Saudi Arabia over the past fifty years is similar to the development in other Arab countries. Arab nations share similar historical backgrounds, beliefs, social practices and, to some extent, economic conditions and
technology advancements. The similarities are also the result of advancements in mass communication such as print media, the Internet, and satellite-television in the past decade. The similarities also are due in part to the increase in exhibitions (painters and calligraphers) by Arabic artists in Arab countries and Europe over the past fifty years.

In the past, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria contributed more to the growth of calligraphy and type design than other Arab nations. The same is true today. For instance, Egypt and Iraq provide advanced education in Arabic calligraphy and Islamic art in specialized institutions and allow colleges and universities to offer fine arts majors. Further, more books on calligraphy and Islamic art are produced in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Turkey than other Arab countries.

Today, Arabic calligraphy takes many forms. These forms can be classified into two major categories or frameworks: fine art, and commercial art. First, calligraphy can be seen in fine arts as either traditional calligraphy or as calligraphic painting as in *Al-Horofiah* art movement (see Figures 1 & 2). Second, in the fields of commercial art, calligraphy exists as freehand calligraphy forms produced for advertisement purposes or as digital typefaces designed for the press and the computer screen (see Figures 3 & 4).

Figure 1: Arabic letters used in a traditional calligraphic style, Thuluth.  
Figure 2: Arabic letters used in a contemporary painting (al-Horofiah) by Diyaa Al-Azaweei.
Calligraphy and Fine Arts

Traditional Calligraphy in Saudi Arabia and Other Arab Nations

Many calligraphers in Arab and Islamic countries have continued the practice and enjoyment of traditional Arabic calligraphy. Among the many Saudi traditional calligraphers are Naseer Al-Maymown and Mohamed Al-Ajlan. Al-Maymown held his first traditional Arabic calligraphy art exhibition in 1993 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The exhibition was successful; it won art critics’ attention and attracted a large number of audiences. Al-Ajlan held a solo exhibition where he extensively used traditional calligraphy, particularly Thuluth and Naskh styles, in paintings. He considered himself not only a calligrapher but also a painter.

Traditional calligraphic artworks are still appreciated and are considered as valuable and collectible pieces. Reproductions of calligraphic masterpieces by old masters are still sold at numerous shops. A small number of original calligraphic artworks...
can also be found at art galleries in major cities in Saudi Arabia. Most reproductions of calligraphic masterpieces are coated with gold or silver and usually imported from Turkey or Egypt.

Several educational institutions in Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, and other Arab nations continue teaching traditional Arabic calligraphy and Islamic art. Currently, there is only one small private school for teaching traditional Arabic calligraphy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The Art Education Department at King Saud University provides a class on Arabic calligraphy and Islamic Arabesque. However, students in the class are not required to learn traditional calligraphy first. Rather they are encouraged to creatively modify existing Arabic letterforms and Arabesque without basic understanding of the meanings traditional Arabic calligraphy and Arabesque convey. Students also lack a deep understanding of the roles traditional Arabic calligraphy and Arabesque play in Islamic and Arabic society. Without these understandings, the letterforms are merely shapes lacking meaning.

**Calligraphy in Arabic Painting—Al-Horofiah**

Al-Horofiah is a major Arabic art movement which started in the late 1940s in several Arab countries (Dagher, 1990). Artists of this art movement have incorporated Arabic calligraphy and letters into their paintings. Artists from that period include Madeha Omer from Iraq, Saeed Okal and Wajeh Nahlah from Lebanon, and Othman Waqee-alah and Ebrahim Al-Solahee from Sudan. These artists endeavor to reveal the artistic power and flexibility of Arabic calligraphy by producing art that references their
Arabic/Islamic identity and cultural backgrounds. Dagher (1990) prefers the term “calligraphic painters” for artists of this movement (p. 59).

Distinguished artists of the Al-Horofiah movement in the 1960s include Yossof Seedah and Hameed Abd-Alalah from Egypt; Naeem Ismail and Mahmood Hamad from Syria; Mohammed Al-Melehee and Fareed Balakaheah from Morocco; Shakeer Hassan, Diyaa Al-Azaweei (see Figure 2 on p. 17), Rafeea Al-Nanassri from Iraq; and Adeel Al-Saeer, Rafeek Sharaf, and Moneer Najem from Lebanon. Today’s generation of al-Horofiah includes Ali Hassan and Yossef Ahmed from Qatar; Fissal Sultan and Adeel Qadeeh from Lebanon; Sakher Frzat and Najee Obied from Syria; Rasheed Al-Qorashi from Algeria; and Mustafa Sanoosi from Morocco.

Al-Salawi (1998) points out that the First Conference for Arab Painters in Baghdad in 1973 encouraged painters to incorporate Arabic calligraphy and Islamic Art in painting. Arabic artists were searching for an art form that expressed the heritage and identity of Arabs and Muslims. The conference emphasized the importance of Arabic calligraphy and Islamic art as inspiration for Arabic artists. The conference also emphasized the limitations of repetition and copying the past. Therefore, artists and critics at the conference questioned where the identity of contemporary Arabic painting would come from (Al-Salawi, 1998, online). Since many artists have considered Arabic calligraphy as a tool or visual element that can emphasize and represent the cultural identity of Arab nations, artists and critics at the conference encouraged the incorporation of Arabic calligraphy in paintings.

Many of Al-Horofia’s artists, such as Wajeh Nahlah, Hassan Massodi, and Othoman Waqee-elah, have strong backgrounds in traditional calligraphy. Using
traditional calligraphic styles, they incorporate passages from the Qu’ran or from famous writers in their paintings (see Figure 5). Other artists of the Al-Horofia incorporate Arabesque and Arabic letters as abstract forms that may be modified and are not necessarily readable or recognizable (see Figure 2 on p. 17).

**Selected artists of Al-Horofiah.** Ahmaed Moustafa, born in 1943 in Egypt, is one of the most recognizable artists who use Arabic traditional calligraphy in his paintings. He obtained a diploma with honors from the Royal Institute of Calligraphy in Egypt. Arabic letters appear in traditional calligraphic styles in Moustafa’s work (see Figure 6).

His use of Arabic letters, in traditional styles, might be a result of a strong background in Arabic calligraphy and his interest in preserving the integrity of Islamic art. By using some Qu’ranic verses in artistic forms, he “demonstrates the power of innovation as well as the intellectual strength of the classic tradition” (piglet.ex.ac.uk, 2002, online).

Figure 5: A painting by Hassan Massodi. Figure 6: Ahmaed Moustafa, Trilogy of the Arab Horse, 1980.
**Al-Horofiah in Saudi Arabia.** According to Elseleman (2002), it was in the late 1970s when Arabic letters started to appear in Saudi paintings. For example, Mohamed Al-Saleem incorporates Arabic letters as abstract forms appearing in horizontal colored lines. Baker Shakhoon uses Arabic letters and Arabesque elements in his artworks to fill areas and build compositions (Elseleman, 2002, online). However, it was not until Naseer Al-Mosa in the late 1980s and Sleman al-Holowah in the 1990s that characteristics of this movement became more distinct. Al-Moosa held his first solo show in Riyadh, presenting himself as a leader of the Al-Horofiah in Saudi Arabia.

Some Saudi artists have been influenced by other Arab painters of al-Horofiah. For instance, Fahad Al-Ruobaqe was influenced by the Tunisian artist Naja Mahdawi. Mahdawi’s influence can be seen in Al-Ruobaqe’s painting in the approach of abstract forms of Arabic letters and the similarity of compositions and use of media. The transparent colors and soft treatments are prominent features in al-Ruobaqe's painting style. Sleman Al-Helwah was also influenced by the Iraqi artist Raafa al-Nasari. Figure 7 illustrates the influence of Al-Nasari on Al-Helwah’s paintings.

![Figure 7: A painting by the Saudi artist Sleman al-Helwah (left), and a painting by the Iraqi artist Raafa Al-Nasari (right).](image-url)
Calligraphy in the Graphic Design Industry

Traditional Calligraphy in Advertisement

In Saudi Arabia and many other Arab countries, traditional and freehand calligraphy are still more appreciated and more in demand than digital typefaces particularly in the commercial art industry. Commercial demand for calligraphy is due to its elegant appearance, flexibility, and uniqueness. Therefore, calligraphy rather than digital typefaces is preferred for signage, posters, logos, corporate identities, business cards, and other printed advertising materials. Calligraphy is also used in commercials on television and on the Internet.

Type Design and Digital Typeface Since 1955

The invention of the Monotype Filmsetter in 1955 had a strong impact on printing Arabic text. The Monotype Filmsetter allowed type composition using photographic paper instead of hot metal types. This technology made it possible for Monotype to develop Naskh series 589, a fully vocalized (containing vowel marks) Arabic type. A year later, Linotype developed a simplified Arabic type for newspapers and magazines. This new type reduced the number of characters from 104 to 56 to allow efficiency and speed in production. In 1959, both Linotype and Monotype made a series of simple Arabic typefaces available in fully vocalized forms and in various sizes. In the following year, phototypesetting was introduced to the general public. Phototypesetting was a great development since it eliminated the need for producing several type sizes for print.

In 1965, the German Dr. Rudolf Hell invented the CRT (Cathode Radiation Tube) exposure system. This technology uses fonts that are stored digitally as bitmaps. AbiFarès (2001) explains the process of digitizing fonts:
To prepare the typefaces for digital storage, the analogue drawings had to be scanned, the scans [had] to be transformed into bitmaps. The pixels of the bitmaps had then to be edited by adding or deleting pixels in order to achieve the closest visual representation of the original drawings (p. 81).

From 1965 until 1972, both Linotype and Monotype adapted their Arabic fonts to this new technology. In 1976, Monotype introduced the Monotype Lasercomp and then digitized their Arabic fonts for use on their Lasercomp typesetter. Linotype also adopted laser technology. Type manufacturers were then busy converting their existing typefaces from photocomposition to digital typesetting.

According to AbiFarès (2001), it was in 1986 when “Esselte Letraset entered the DTP (desktop publishing) market with their Ready-Set-Go DTP software application. This was Arabised [sic.] by Diwan (a London-based software company) and released under the name Al-Nashir Al-Maktabi” (p. 82). This Arabic DPT software used several Arabic fonts (i.e., Yaqut and Badr) from Linotype as part of the software. Later, Esselte Letraset introduced a new publishing software called Al-Nashir Al-Sahafi.

In late 1980s, Adobe Company introduced PostScript technology to handle typeface outlines. This technology has enhanced the type industry in general and made it possible to create elegant Arabic typefaces that retain traditional calligraphic styles. The continuous growth of type technologies and contextual analysis capabilities in DTP software have made it possible to produce solutions for complex typefaces (e. g., Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese) that have a wide range of glyphs and special characters.

**Context-related character substitution.** Arabic type takes full advantage of a technology called context-related character substitution. A font developed using this technology has built-in instructions to enable Arabic characters or letters to automatically

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and on-the-fly change their shapes according to their positions within a word. In other words, “character codes change their numeric code automatically depending on their neighbouring [sic.] characters, in order to produce a different representation of the same letter” (AbiFarès, 2001, p 152).

The importance of this technology to the Arabic type industry lies in the fact that the shape of an Arabic letter is determined by its position within a word. This concept is usually called Arabic’s four shape variations: initial, medial, final, and freestanding. For example, in the Thuluth style, the most respectful calligraphic style, the letter Mem may have as many as fourteen shapes depending not only on its position within a word, but also on its connection to the letters following and/or preceding it. Since most Arabic letters are connected, “more importance is given to the shape of whole words than to that of individual letters” (AbiFarès, 2001, p. 160). This principle is also applied to digital Arabic typeface.

Therefore, in order to produce visually pleasing letter combinations and words for Arabic script, a large number of ligatures are needed. This shows the strong tie between Arabic script and its calligraphic tradition. In contrast, type designers of Latin script utilize a typographic approach that is different from its calligraphic cursive script. Since letters in the typographic approach are not connected in Latin script, fewer ligatures are needed.

**Typeface weights and styles.** Type designers of Arabic typefaces usually develop sets of two to three weights and a sloped version for each typeface. Lack of rich variety and expanded font family is due to “the underdeveloped area of Arabic typography and
type design” (AbiFarès, 2001, p. 163). Variety of typefaces families, styles, and weights are essential for graphic design and advertising industry.

Typefaces are generally created in certain styles to be used for specific design applications. For example, the Times typeface was designed for newspapers; it is therefore used most often for small type and rarely for display or large size print.

Typeface families (a set of typefaces sharing one design structure) may have weight and proportional variations that could be used for several purposes (e.g., emphases and headings). However, graphic designers using Arabic types suffer from the small number of typeface variations and their poor quality. AbiFarès (2001) criticized the poor quality of Arabic type design:

> Arabic type design still suffers from being chained within the confines of its glorious calligraphic heritage. Calligraphic samples from that heritage are too often used as the one and only way to create quality in Arabic typography. This ill-informed attitude has in fact been an obstruction to the natural progress of Arabic type design – a progress similar to the one that has taken place for the Latin script. Walking towards the future facing backwards does not create the most impressive culture (p. 168-169).

AbiFarès (2001) goes on to claim that traditional calligraphy has negative impacts on digital type design:

> The tools of pen and ink, and the traditional dedication of calligraphers to their old masters, are no longer useful – in fact they are more of an obstacle. Arabic calligraphy is no longer sufficient to contemporary communication needs, nor appropriate to modern tools and media (p. 203).

**Type-foundries and designers of Arabic types.** When software for designing typefaces (e.g., Fontgrapher and FontLab) became easy to use and within the designers’ reach, numerous independent type-foundries and designers began creating typefaces and distributing them via the Internet. AbiFarès (2001) states that “in the past 15 years, far
more typefaces have been designed and produced than in the entire preceding 500 years of type production” (p. 141). However, the Arabic market has just begun to adjust to this new development. A few thousand Arabic typefaces have been created, but this number appears very small when compared to 50,000 fonts (about 6000 type families) created for the Latin alphabet in digital form (Bringhurst, 2001).

In the case of Arabic script, most typefaces in the market were developed by Western type-foundries (e.g., Agfa Monotype, DecoType, and Linotype). AbiFarès (2001) notes that the works of the Arab type designers provide more “daring and experimental solutions” than Western type-foundries and designers working with traditional Arab calligraphers (p. 202).

Among the rare Arabic type-foundries is Boutros International established in London and headed by Mourad and Arlette Boutros. Their mission is to develop Arabic typefaces while keeping traditional calligraphic rules. They developed typefaces which include Boutros Asifa, Boutros Farah, and Boutros Najm (see Figure 8). These typefaces

![Figure 8: Digital typefaces from Boutros International](image)

![Figure 9: Digital clipart by Mamoun Sakkal.](image)
have a clean and easy-to-read design, but they do not necessarily introduce new
techniques or solutions for Arabic script.

Another successful Arabic type designer is Mamoun Sakkal, a Syrian-born U.S.
citizen. Sakkal developed a number of Arabic typefaces and the first computer clip art
collection of Arabic calligraphic designs in 1992 (see Figure 9).

Diwan Software Limited has developed several new techniques for Arabic
typefaces. For example, the company created a typeface called Diwan Mishafi, which
was designed by the acclaimed Iraqi calligrapher Hamid Al-Saadi and won a prestigious
Certificate of Excellence in Type Design from the Type Directors Club in 2000. This
clear and elegant Arabic typeface “contains built-in intelligence to format text entered
using the typeface to match the correct Arabic calligraphic rules… [the typeface] makes
it possible to compose proper Qur’anic calligraphy with all their shapes, markings and
recitation symbols” (diwan.com, online). The Diwan Mishafi typeface was designed in
the Naskh style, comprised of more than 3000 different letterforms. It is considered to be
one of the most complex typefaces ever created. Diwan Software Limited also created
Al-Nashir al-Sahafi, one of the most popular DTP applications in the Middle East, and
has published one of the largest libraries of quality Arabic typefaces. FontWorld, Inc. of
Brooklyn, NY, produced several Arabic fonts: Dedan, Yismal, Hager, Yakshan, Abdael,
and Zemran families. Each family includes Light, Medium, Bold, and Heavy variant.

**Problems with newly designed typefaces.** Alnajdi (2001) noticed that “the unique
nature of Arabic letters, in which the characters must follow specific writing rules and
standards, has made it difficult to reproduce Arabic letters using a computer because they
were not designed in their traditional forms to meet these standards” (p.24). Most of these
difficulties are being solved by many individuals and corporations. However, the real challenges for Arabic type designers are artistic and aesthetic issues. The current styles of Arabic typefaces are still far lower in quality when compared to Latin typefaces or Arabic traditional styles (traditional calligraphy styles).

Comparison Between Far East and Arab Nations

Modern Calligraphy in the Far East

Similar to the Al-Horofiah art movement in Arab countries, a new movement called the Modern Calligraphy (or Experimental Calligraphy, as some Chinese scholars prefer to call it) started at the beginning of the twentieth century in Far East (e.g., China, Japan, Taiwan, and Korea). YingShi Yang, the board director of the China Society of Modern Calligraphic Art Yang, explains “I do not think ‘modern calligraphy’ is the right and exact term to describe the new art expressions derived from traditional calligraphy since early 1980s. I believe it sounds better to use the term ‘experimental calligraphy’” (Yang, 2002, online).

Artists from the Experimental Calligraphy and the Al-Horofiah movements use similar approaches and techniques in their artworks. However, they use different tools and materials. For instance, while artists of Experimental calligraphy in the Far East usually use Chinese brushes and black ink (colored ink is less common), artists of Al-Horofiah movement use split-reed pens or flat brushes, with colored ink and oil colors preferred.

Kanayama is a famous Japanese artist born in Hamamatsu in 1943. He combines approaches and techniques from traditional calligraphy and painting in search of new forms of art. In Onna (see Figure 10), meaning “woman,” we can see a beautiful and
feminine form produced by the movements and interactions of elegant strokes in Kanji style. The Kanji calligraphy style is developed from Chinese characters and considered the oldest and most elegant script calligraphy style in Japanese history. Kanayama’s use of soft and transparent colors also suggests the softness and sensitivity of a woman.

Fung Ming Chip is one of Taiwan’s leading contemporary calligraphers (see figure 11). Chip’s artworks are examples of contemporary Taiwanese calligraphic works that fuse influences from Eastern and Western painting. The mixture of Eastern and Western style and perspective in Chip’s artwork might be a result of his long residence in New York where he was exposed to Western ideology. Chip has developed various “non-traditional scripts which employ unconventional stroke orders, ink tones, compositional arrangements, and even the shadows of characters” (Daines, 2002, online). Michael
Goedhuis, a renowned London art dealer, believes that Chip shows a deep “understanding of the classical cannon with a long exposure to Western modernisation [sic.]” (cited in Daines, 2002, online).

**Calligraphy Education**

Since calligraphy is considered a significant form of art in China, academic education in calligraphy is available. Chinese students can proceed to advanced studies in calligraphy and can earn BA and MA degrees at Fine Art schools in Beijing, Nanjing, and Tianjin. Moreover, at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, students can work toward doctoral degrees focusing on calligraphy. According to YingShi (2002), the calligraphy program at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts was established to educate calligraphers to be specialized artists.

In South Korea, calligraphy is taught at college and university levels, and students may receive a BA in calligraphy. For example, at Wonkwang University in Iksan City, the Department of Calligraphy is one of the Fine Art school’s major departments. In contrast, students at Saudi universities and colleges learn calligraphy in design classes offered by Art Education programs.

In Egypt, calligraphy is not taught at Fine Art schools, but at separate institutes. In general, educational institutions in Arab countries offer only diplomas or letters of completion. Advanced studies in calligraphy or academic degrees are not available in Arab nations. In the case of Saudi Arabia, there are no educational institutions that provide an academic degree or certification in calligraphy.

The Saudi government, in the late 1980s, closed the Calligraphy Institute and was no longer interested in establishing schools for teaching traditional calligraphy. Currently,
there is only one small private school for teaching calligraphy, Alkaateb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy (AIIAC) founded in early 1990’s in Riyadh.

**Calligraphy Associations and Exhibitions**

Currently, there is only one small calligraphy organization in Saudi Arabia, Arabic Calligraphy Organization in Alqateef City (ACOAC). Within the city of Alqateef, the ACOAC has organized a few calligraphy art exhibitions, provided traditional calligraphy workshops, and organized public lectures on the art of calligraphy.

However, in China, a large number of organizations and associations for calligraphers have promoted the art of calligraphy all over the country. For instance, the Chinese Calligraphers Association (CCA) as well as regional calligraphy associations have organized various exhibitions and training programs. According to a survey by the CCA, there are more than 100 major calligraphy exhibitions in China each year (Yang, 2002, online).

There is an urgent need for more associations and sponsors to promote and organize exhibitions devoted to the art of traditional and contemporary calligraphy in Saudi Arabia. There is also a need to establish channels and strategies for Arab calligraphers to share their experiences and insights and to organize nationwide calligraphy activities which include exhibitions, workshops, and lectures.

**Calligraphy and Technology**

As the computer and printing technologies have become part of our everyday lives, “practical functions of calligraphy are decreasing and calligraphy is getting far away from the daily life of ordinary people as the country is getting more and more
computerized and printing is everywhere” (YingShi, 2002, online). This is also the case in Arab societies.

Printing from movable type and digital technology had greater success in Europe than it did in China, Japan, and Arab countries. This is due to the small number of characters European scripts. Invention of context-related character substitution, contextual analysis capabilities, and other built-in software were developed as solutions for complex typefaces and scripts (e.g., Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese) which have wide ranges of glyphs and special characters.

**Publications on Calligraphy**

In China, the national magazine *Modern Calligraphy* “has played an important role in organizing the modern calligraphers nationwide and carrying out academic research in the field” (Yang, 2002, online). In Saudi Arabia, there are no specialized magazines or journals for the art of calligraphy or type design. Very likely such publications do not exist in other Arab nations.

Available books on Arabic calligraphy often discuss the historical development and practical aspects of traditional calligraphy styles. Books on creating contemporary Arabic type and typography are not available to graphic design students in Arab countries at the present time. AbiFarès (2001) points out that:

> All of today's books on Arabic script -most of which are at least 10 years old- do not go beyond the traditional conservative calligraphic drawing rules of Arabic letters, and they tend to look complicated enough to discourage any dedicated young would-be type designer from ever crossing the threshold (on-line).

There is a need for books on Arabic calligraphy that relate to today's graphic design industry and commercial arts. These books should address and discuss topics such
as creating digital typefaces, contemporary issues in typography, and concerns about aesthetics.

**Representation in Calligraphy and Typefaces**

**Introduction**

The term “Arabic calligraphy” is used today to refer to a number of different practices including traditional calligraphy, type design, calligraphic painting, and typography. For the purpose of this study, discussion will be focused mainly on traditional calligraphy and digital typeface design.

Many believe that the root of digital typeface design is in traditional calligraphy. Both calligraphy and digital typefaces are means of representing the cultural identity of a civilization.

**Cultural Identity and Type Design**

Since the cultural identity of a civilization is deeply rooted in its arts and languages, calligraphy can play a significant role as a form of art and as a symbolic representation of cultural identity. Calligraphy (handwritten form) and typography (digital and printed forms) derive their importance from their strong ties to both languages and arts. The visual form of an alphabet and the styles of its characters (letterforms) are considered significant elements in carrying and promoting the identity and heritage of a culture.

For example, Arabic calligraphy and Islamic Art clearly distinguish Arabic culture and civilization from other nations. Many believe that the styles and designs of Arabic type have changed since the early eighteenth century with the introduction of press and computer technology. Arabs fear that this change or modification
(modernization as some prefer to call it) may detract from Arabic identity and heritage that the traditional styles carry. As calligraphy and typography visually represent the Arabic language, reveal the identity of Arabic culture, and include themselves as fundamental components of Islamic Art, the way they are presented has become a major concern.

Today, hundreds of Arabic digital typefaces have been created and used in Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations. These typefaces come in various styles (as previously discussed). Some have a traditional appearance while others look very contemporary. On one hand, a large number of traditional calligraphers in Saudi Arabia argue that traditional calligraphy styles such as Thuluth, Naskh, and Diwani are more elegant and appealing than modern typefaces, and that these best represent Arabic and Islamic identity. On the other hand, some contemporary type designers and calligraphers believe that a modification in letterforms and styles is necessary to meet the need of the Saudi graphic design industry and communication technologies. The characteristics of some Arabic typefaces will be identified and discussed in the following pages.

**Type Design Considerations and Cultural Identity**

Currently in Arab countries, the majority of companies prefer their names appear in Arabic as well as English. Graphic designers and calligraphers, when designing logos or corporate identities, seek a pleasing visual balance between Arabic typefaces and Latin typefaces as they appear together. This consideration may have led some designers to incorporate design principles from Latin typefaces into Arabic typefaces.

Other designers propose using Latin and Greek letterforms to represent Arabic letterforms. For example, Yahya Boutemene designed his typeface in such a way that the
Arabic letterforms resemble lowercase Latin and Greek letters as much as possible (see Figure 12). Creation of the Boutemene typeface might have involved actual Latin and Greek letters (whenever possible) that were rotated or inverted to create Arabic letterforms (Haralambous, 2002, online).

While these approaches may improve the visual appearance of Arabic and Latin scripts when used together, the approach can lead some designers to base their designs entirely on Latin typefaces. Sole use of Latin typeface as inspiration for Arabic letterforms raises serious issues about the loss of Arabic and Islamic identity as reflected in traditional Arabic calligraphy.

Alnajdi (2001) believes that “the identity of Islamic culture is expressed perfectly through the traditional forms of Arabic calligraphy, which effectively promote the inherited beliefs and traditions of Muslims and Arabs.” AbiFarès (2001) also argues that “Arabic type need not lose its beauty and creativity when applied to modern means of digital reproduction and communication. Designers of Arabic typefaces should be aware of issues such as cultural identity and tradition” (online).
The six main traditional calligraphy styles (Kufi, Naskh, Riq’a, Farisi, Thuluth, and Diwani) do not share similar visual codes or characteristics. For example, while the Naskh style is a rounded cursive style with short horizontal strokes and relatively equal ascenders and descenders with plain endings; the Kufi style usually has an angular geometric and ornamental appearance with decorative stroke ends (see Figure 13).

![Image of Kufi Styles](http://www.sakkal.com)

Figure 13: Kufi Styles: Traditional Naskh style(left) and, from top to bottom: Foliate Kufi, Knotted Kufi, and Square Kufi(right). Source: Mamoun Sakkal (2/2/2004), www.sakkal.com (online)

Four approaches are commonly used for creating typefaces. Three carry the Islamic and Arabic identity the fourth does not. In the first approach, the designer traces or imitates a traditional calligraphic style, then makes some minor adjustments before digitizing it. The second approach is to simplify a certain traditional calligraphic style, thereby maintaining the fundamental structure of letterforms and distinctive visual features. The third approach suggests that the designer construct his/her new typeface based on a careful study of the structure designs and patterns of traditional calligraphic styles. In this approach, the designer may introduce some modifications and combine
features from more than one traditional style. In the fourth approach, the designer may base his/her new typeface on some Arabic typefaces that are familiar to non-Arabs, such as fonts developed for computer use. This approach, however, does not represent the identity of Islamic and Arabic culture.

**Arabic Type Classifications**

Arabic typefaces may be classified into three major groups: (a) traditional typefaces, (b) simplified or traditional-based typefaces, and (c) nontraditional typefaces.

**Traditional typefaces.** The design and style of the digital traditional typefaces are entirely based on the most common traditional Arabic calligraphy styles such as Naskh, Thuluth, Riq’a, and Kufi. Since typefaces in this group maintain the look and calligraphic rules of the traditional styles, they are considered traditional. Monotype Co., a major international typefoundry company, has developed a number of traditional Arabic typefaces, including Thuluth, Riq’a, Kufi, and another called Nastaaliq.

Naskh is a rounded cursive style, easy to read, and highly legible. AbiFarès (2001) believes that Naskh was developed as early as the 7th century and used for secular and commercial writing. The Naskh style became popular only after it had been redesigned by Ibn Muglah in the 10th century and aesthetically improved by Ibn Al-Bawaab and other calligraphers (Safad, 1979; AbiFarès, 2001). Since then, the Naskh style has replaced the Kufi style for writing the Qur'an. Today, simplified Naskh typefaces are most widely used for books, newspapers, and magazines.

The Dutch company DecoType, also developed DTP Naskh, DTP Thuluth, DTP Riq’a, and DTP Nastaaliq fonts. These typefaces are said to truly reflect the traditional
calligraphy styles and provide hundreds of alternate letter variations handled by ACE (the Arabic Calligraphic Engine), specifically designed built-in software.

In the year 2000, the Diwan Software Limited company created Mishaif typeface, which is considered the most complex Naskh style typeface ever developed (diwan.com, 2001, online). Diwan Software Limited was founded in 1985 in London. The company announced in September, 2000, at the 17th Unicode Conference in San Jose, California, the completion of its encoding of the Holy Qur’an into Unicode together with a typeface capable of rendering all the calligraphy of the hand-written Qur’an. The typeface was called Mishaif (Qur’anic). The Mishaif typeface retains both the beautiful letterforms of the traditional Naskh calligraphy style and its calligraphic rules (see Figures 14 and 15). The typeface was designed by Hamid Al-Saadi, a well-known Iraqi calligrapher born in 1955.

The Mishaif typeface contains built-in intelligence to format text to match Arabic calligraphic rules of the traditional Naskh style. Therefore, the font is classified under the group of AAT fonts (Apple Advanced Typography). Mishaif, as an AAT font, includes a list of features that use the AAT facilities. Examples of the features included in Mishaif typeface are Character Alternatives, Contextual Alternatives, Contextual Forms, Ligatures, Diwan Mishaif Alternatives, Final Wide Forms, and Other Wide Forms.

As The Mishaif typeface truly maintains the shape of the letterforms and calligraphic rules of Naskh, many consider it capable of producing beautiful text. For example, Mishaif includes such traditional Naskh rules as making the vertical strokes of letters thinner than horizontal strokes and pointed and fine endings for certain letters, especially in their final and free-standing positions. Mishaif typeface thus mimics pen
strokes in writing traditional Arabic calligraphy. Moreover, just as can be found in traditional Naskh style, the dots (necessary parts of some letters) are in diamond-shapes and strokes have plain ends (san serif). Figure 15 shows a considerable similarity between the Mishafi typeface developed in 2000 and handwritten calligraphy by Osman Hafiz (dated 1052) in a traditional Naskh style.

The Mishafi font also includes all the variations of letter shapes, vocalization marks, and the decorative signs used in traditional Naskh style. Therefore, the Mishafi typeface very closely resembles the traditional Naskh style, which made it highly regarded by those wishing to preserve Islamic and Arabic heritage.

As the font offers flexibility and provides many choices for writing any word in a variety of shapes, user of the font is “expected to have some knowledge about Naskh
calligraphy, or at least should be aware of it” (Diwan.com, 2002, online). In fact, some users of Mishafi typeface and Al-Nashir al-Sahafi software believe that in order to compose elegant text using this typeface, strong knowledge of calligraphy and Naskh style is required.

Typesetting using the Mishafi typeface can be an extremely time-consuming task. However, Mishafi was not intended for everyday communications or word processing software, but for setting Qur'anic or other important text. Therefore, it should not be considered as a suitable typeface for books, newspapers, and advertisements.

Unfortunately, the Mishafi font can only be used with al-Nashir al-Sahafi or al-Nashir al-Maktabi, Diwan's publishing applications. As of April, 2002, al-Nashir al-Sahafi (Dibaj) with Mishafi & Diwan fonts cost $1,595 for Macintosh and $995 for Windows. The Mishai is considered very expensive when compared with other Arabic typefaces that ranging from $20 to $80.

Figure 15: Comparison between traditional handwritten Naskh style and digital font Mishafi.
**Simplified or traditional-based typefaces.** Typefaces from this group were designed based on the traditional style but with simplifications of both letterforms and traditional calligraphy rules. Simplifications can range from minor to major modifications. Some consider these typefaces to be too simplified and find them unattractive. However, simplified typefaces maintain the look of Arabic traditional calligraphy and carry visual elements and features that still reveal the heritage and identity of Islamic and Arabic culture.

Among the well-designed typefaces of this group (simplified or traditional based typefaces) is Boutros Najm (see Figure 16). The typeface was designed by “Boutros International,” a company established in London by Mourad and Arlette Boutros. The typeface family includes different weights and styles: Light, Medium, Bold, Medium, Italic, Outline, and Shadow. These fonts are available in Postscript and TrueType formats. Each font style is $40.

Boutros Najm typefaces might have been based on 14th century or earlier designs of the Kufi style (see Figures 17). The designer has kept the principles of the traditional Kufi calligraphic rule. For example, mid-point knots are used in the letters Alf and Lam, the main structures of the letterforms are from traditional Kufi and, overall, the Boutros Najm typeface has a simpler ornamental quality than traditional Kufi styles (see Figure 17). The designer introduced new adjustments, such as converting the typical Kufi dot (circular or oval) into four-pointed star shapes, adding more space between the letters, and shortening the heights of the letters Alf and Lam.

The designer was successful in simplifying traditional Kufi style and keeping its identity. Therefore, this typeface truly represents the spirit and essence of traditional
Arabic and Islamic calligraphy and acts as a reminder of Arabesque as well. Since it is rather decorative, this typeface, with its decorative letters, is more suitable for headings or display text than for body text.

Figure 16: Characteristic features of Boutros Najm typeface.

Figure 17: Comparison between different designs of the traditional handwritten Kufi style and digital font Boutros Nijm.
Nontraditional typefaces. The structural designs of nontraditional typefaces are based on simple geometric shapes or on other letterforms of non-Arabic languages, mainly Latin letterforms. Nontraditional typefaces do not distinctly carry the Islamic identity nor follow the Arabic calligraphic rules. However, some have clean and attractive designs with acceptable legibility. Among the well-designed typefaces in this group are the Arabtek and Ahmed typefaces.

Arabtek was designed in 2000 by Syrian-born US citizen and award-winning architect and designer Mamoun Sakkal (see Figure 18). Arabtek was designed to be compatible with the English typeface Teknik. AbiFarès (2001) believes that “the letterforms come from Kufi and Square Kufi” (p. 219). However, the influence of the Latin typeface, Teknik, on Arabtek is more apparent. Arabtek has a contemporary, compact architectural appearance. The typeface does not imitate handwriting with a reed pen and, therefore, the calligraphy essence is not a characteristic of Arabtek typeface. Arabtek typeface has an industrial and machine-made feel.

The strokes of letterforms in the Arabtek typeface are relatively equal in thickness. The strokes also have slab square serifs. Letterforms are reduced to their essential figures with a rather large x-high and square or rectangular dots. These features are certainly uncommon characteristics of traditional Arabic calligraphy.
In 1996, Ahmed Humeid developed the Ahmed typeface for BYTE, a Middle Eastern magazine. The typeface is geometric, modern, simple, and clean. The typeface comes in Light, Regular, and Bold weights, making it appropriate for graphic design applications (see Figure 19). The typeface also has open counterforms and a clear, legible appearance, making it a good choice for packaging and sign applications. The letterforms are also reduced to essential forms and have relatively uniform strokes. The remarkable contribution of the Ahmed typeface is that it has solved the problem of long ascenders and descenders found in most Arabic typefaces. The Ahmed typeface “spread among designers and publishing houses in the Middle East… [and] was copied and distributed but never officially sold” (AbiFarès, 2001, p. 209).

The designer might have been inspired by the contemporary, clean designs of Latin san serif typefaces for their contemporary simple, clean designs. Figure 19 illustrates Ahmed typeface’s compatibility with some common Latin condensed san serif typefaces, Trade Gothic and Eurostile.

Figure 19: Ahmed Light typeface and the Latin font Eurostile Condensed (above); and Ahmed Bold and the Latin font Trade Gothic Bold Condensed (bottom).
Traditional calligraphy and Type Design as a Form of Representation

Before discussing issues of representation in traditional Arabic calligraphy and type design, it is important to briefly examine the nature of these forms of art. The art of calligraphy and type design are nonrepresentational styles focusing on form, shape, color, and texture rather than the representation of objects or reality. In other words, calligraphy and type design are abstract art forms.

As calligraphers and type designers shape letterforms, they create new forms and images. These images refer to, and stand for something other than abstract form itself. In fact, they contain signals signifying further meanings. Therefore, it is appropriate to discuss issues of representation in calligraphy and type design from a semiotic theoretical perspective. My discussion will be mainly focused on the issues of cultural identity representation, as it is the focal point of my study.

Semiotics (theory of signs)

Semiotics began to become a major approach to cultural studies in the late 1960s. It is the study of signs originated by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussue (1857-1913), and the American philosopher Charles Peirce (1839-1913) (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001; Sebeok, 2001; & Chandler, 2002). A brief explanation of Saussure’s, Peirce’s, and Jay Bolter’s theories will be introduced before I discuss how they may apply to the art of calligraphy and type design. It is worth mentioning here that neither Saussure nor Peirce studied the social use of signs.

Saussure’s theory. Saussure defines a sign as being composed of a signifier (the form which the sign takes) and the signified (the concept it represents or stand for) (Chandler, 2002, online). For Saussure, the relationship between the signifier and
signified is arbitrary. In his model, a sign refers only to a concept and not to an object or a thing, and the meaning is “purely structural and relational rather than referential” (Chandler, 2002, online).

Saussure emphasizes that a sign makes sense only in relation to other signs and that “everything depends on relations” (Saussure as cited in Chandler, 2002, online). This principle is explained in his theory of oppositional differences between signs. He argues that “concepts... are defined not positively, in terms of their content, but negatively by contrast with other items in the same system. What characterizes each most exactly is being whatever the others are not” (Saussure as cited in Chandler, 2002, online).

**Peirce’s theory.** Peirce’s model consists of three components: 1) the representamen (the form in which the sign takes), an interpretant (the sense made of the sign), and an object (what the sign refers to). The representamen and object have similar meaning and function as the signifier and signified in Saussure’s model.

Peirce suggested three types of signs: iconic, indexical, and symbolic. Iconic signs resemble what they signify. For instance, a drawing of a person is an iconic sign because it resembles or imitates him or her (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, p. 357). In an indexical sign, the signifier is not arbitrary but is “directly connected in some way (physically or causally) to the signified” (Chandler, 2002, online). For example, smoke can signify fire and a ringing phone is a signal of a call. The relationship between the signifier and signified in a symbolic sign is purely conventional or arbitrary. Examples of symbolic signs include alphabetical letters, national flags, and traffic lights. It is important to note here that a sign can also combine any of these three types.
**Hjelmslev’s theory.** The linguist Louis Hjelmslev believes that there is no content (Saussure’s signifier) without an expression (signified), nor is there an expression without content. Table 1 illustrates Hjelmsley’s framework where he conveys that both expression and content have substance and form.

There are four categories: substance of expression, form of expression, substance of content, and form of content. Theorists such as Christian Metz, Baggaley, Duck, and Tudor have built upon Hjelmsley’s theoretical distinction, however, they differ somewhat in what is assigned to the four categories (Chandler, 2002, online).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signifiers: plane of expression</th>
<th>Substance of expression: physical materials of the medium (e.g., photographs, recorded voices, printed words on paper)</th>
<th>Form of expression: language, formal syntactic structure, technique and style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signifieds: plane of content</td>
<td>Substance of content: “human content” (Metz), textual world, subject matter, genre</td>
<td>Form of content: “semantic structure” (Baggaley &amp; Duck), “thematic structure” (including narrative) (Metz)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Hjelmsley’s framework

**Meaning and identity.** The significance of constructing meanings comes from its relationship to the development of identity. Hall (1997) explains that “meaning is what gives us a sense of our identity” (p. 3).

The Arabic alphabet, with its long calligraphy history, has become an identity for Muslims representing their faith and culture. History has taught us how the Arabic
alphabet was a critical issue of identity for the Turks at the beginning of the 1900s. For a long period of time, the Arabic alphabet was used for writing the Turkish language. Turkey also has a long history of the art of Arabic calligraphy and Turkish calligraphers produced some of the greatest Arabic calligraphy in history. However, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World War I and the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Arabic script was given up in 1928 and replaced with letterforms based on Western (Latin) characters.

This major shift was intended to bring Turkey closer to the West and break its tie with Islamic and Arabic traditions and history (Schimmel, 1984). Evidently, the visual appearance of Arabic letterforms suggested links between Islam, Arab, and Turkish identity. Here, we can say that the signifier was the use of Arabic letterforms, and the signified might have been concepts of Islamic and Arab culture.

Another example of the significance of representation calligraphy can be seen on Al-Kiswah, a black cloth covering Al-Ka'bah, the most famous sanctuary of Islam in Saudi Arabia. The use of calligraphy on Al-Kiswah clearly demonstrates the significance of Arabic calligraphy in cultural identity. Arabic calligraphy is also used on the national flag of Saudi Arabia (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: Thuluth calligraphic style in gold used to decorate al-Kabah (left), and the national flag of Saudi Arabia (right).
Meanings are constructed through creation and interpretation of signs. According to Peirce, “we think only in signs… [and] nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign” (Peirce as cited in Chandler, 2002). Anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as “signifying” something - referring to or standing for something other than itself. Therefore, the process of interpretation or construction of meanings starts only after recognition something that is a sign.

Signs take the forms of words, images, sounds, flavors, actions, or objects and so forth. However, the things in themselves do not have fixed or unchanged meaning. Hall states that “we give things meaning by how we use them, or integrate them into our everyday practices” (p. 3). Therefore, we can say that the meaning of calligraphy or a certain typeface styles in Arabic and Islamic cultures depends on how people use, represent, think of, and feel about it within a certain period of time and context of use. For example, the Kufi style was considered sacred and highly regarded and was used for writing the Qur’an from the seventh until the end of the ninth century. The Naskh style, at that time, was used only for secular and commercial writing. However, in the tenth century, Naskh was enhanced. Consequently, it replaced the Kufi style and became the standard script for writing the Qur’an. Since then, Naskh has been given a new meaning; it is no longer an ordinary style. Today, Naskh is considered to be one of the most elegant and honored Arabic calligraphy styles.

**Levels of meanings.** Meanings are produced through a complex social relationship. In semiotics, *Denotative* meaning is the literal meaning of a sign. A *Connotative* meaning is the social, cultural, and historical meaning that is added to a
sign’s literal (denotative) meaning. Roland Bathes argues that “myth occurs when we read connotative meaning as denotative (i.e., literal) meanings, and thus naturalize what are in fact meanings derived from complex social ideologies” (as explained in Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, p. 352). Therefore, connotative meanings play a significant role in constructing much of what has been taken as fact.

Sakka the Kufi typeface, designed by Mamoun Sakkal in 1999, is an example of how connotative and denotative meanings apply to calligraphy and type design (see Figure 21). For instance, at the denotation level, one may identify the shapes (letterforms) as characters of a certain language. He/she may recognize the straight vertical and horizontal strokes, the decorative foliage endings of letters, the knots in some letters, the short descenders, the circle dots, the extended vertical strokes, the angular geometric style, the absence of contrast in the thickness in strokes, and the similarity of its style to the traditional Kufi styles (see Figure 17 on p. 43).

![Figure 21: Sakka Kufi typeface designed by Mamoun Sakkal.](image)
At the second level (*connotation*), one may use his/her conventional conceptual classifications of typefaces and calligraphy styles to read or construct meaning from what he/she noticed in the first *decorative* level (denotation). Thus, he/she may link the foliage-shape endings of letters with concepts of ornamentation and beautification and link the uniform thickness of strokes and extended vertical strokes with power and strength. He/she may also link the geometric forms with simplicity and harmony and the knots with unity and connection. He/she might even draw a historical link between this contemporary typeface, Sakka Kufi, and the traditional ornamental archaic Kufi style. This link may even illustrate the theory of *intertextuality* where an image (Sakka Kufi) anchors another image(s) (traditional old Kufi).

Since traditional Kufi is the oldest script developed and enhanced during the early Islamic period, one can also read the style of Sakka Kufi as a myth by linking its characteristics with the cultural concept of Islamic art. Then, at the level of myth, the typeface will become a signifier for national identity, cultural identity, or religious identity. Sakka Kufi, then, could be drawing on the myth of Islam-ness or Arab-ness.

**Binary Opposition Theory**

Difference is essential to meaning and the way we understand things. Binary oppositions are oppositions such as hot /cold, nature/culture, and formal/informal. Many theories of differences have explained the ways in which these oppositional categories are interrelated and ideologically and historically constructed.

According to binary opposition theory, “language consists of signifiers, but in order to produce meaning, the signifiers have to be organized into a *system of differences*” (Chandler, 2002, online). In other words, the meaning of a concept is often
defined in relation to its direct opposite. For example, we will not be able to recognize a typeface or calligraphy style as elegant or formal if we fail to recognize the less elegant, casual, and informal ones. Another example is when one perceives a certain typeface as “traditional” or representing Islamic and Arabic identity, then shown a typeface that is perceived to differ greatly from that style will be considered “nontraditional”, not representing Islamic and Arabic identity. Further, the “different” style may appear to some people as modern or contemporary, or it might even appear to be a Western style.

**Signifiers and Signifieds in Calligraphy and Type Design**

One may wonder whether there are signs in calligraphy and typefaces. If so, what forms do the signs take? How do we know that they are signs? Are they iconic, indexical, or symbolic signs? (see page 47 for definitions). Where do the signifier and signified exist, and what is the relationship between them?

The art of calligraphy and type design function in a symbolic mode; in other words, their signs are symbolic. According to Peirce, the relationship between the signifier and the signified in a symbolic sign system is arbitrary (Peirce as cited in Delate, 2002, online). In the semiotic approach, images and words can function as signifiers, as can particular forms, colors, textures, shapes, lines, and styles.

In calligraphy, the signifier can take the shape and/or style of a letterform, and the signified is the mood(s) or concept(s) the shape stands for. The style/shape of a letterform, then, works as a sign. When we have a sign, we interpret and construct meaning for it based on a pre-determined representational system. However, it is important to understand that “interpretations are always followed by other interpretation, in endless chain” (Hall, 2002, p. 42).
Type designers express concepts in their typefaces through the use of styles and shape of the letterforms. The styles or shapes of letterforms in a typeface then function as visual codes. For instance, they may use simple geometric forms for their letterforms to express simplicity, purity, modernity; or they may also make the letterforms’ strokes bold and straight with sharp edges to express masculinity and power. The style of a typeface may also represent historical sense as to signify a particular historical period. The typographer or calligrapher can make “the meaning of a text (or its absence of meaning) clarified, honored and shared, or knowingly disguised” (Bringhurst, 2001, p. 17).

**Visual Codes in Typefaces**

I have discussed the visual codes and characteristics of a number of Arabic typefaces and traditional calligraphy styles in pages 40-45. The importance of visual codes is not in what they are but in their function: constructing meaning and transmitting it (Hall, 2002). They work through a system of representation where meaning can be developed or constructed. In the art of calligraphy and type design, visual codes (within a certain culture) fix the relationships between concepts and signs.

“Members of the same culture must share sets of concepts, images and ideas which enable them to think and feel about the world, and thus to interpret the world, in roughly similar ways” (Hall, 2002, p. 4). Therefore, people within a certain culture read and interpret visual codes in approximately similar manners. This may explain the reason why certain calligraphy styles (e.g., Kufi, Nashk, Thuluth, and Diwani) are considered traditional or classic within Arab nations. People pass the meaning and the process of representation and interpretation of calligraphic signs from one generation to the next.
Time, then, is an important factor in developing and maintaining meaning, concept, or even myth.

**Cultural Significance of Calligraphy**

*Distinction between Writing and Calligraphy*

Prior to discussing the cultural significance of calligraphy in Saudi Arabia and Arab nations, a brief explanation of differences between writing and calligraphy is provided. The explanation assists in understanding the role of calligraphy in Arab and Islamic culture since the sixth century.

Throughout the long history of Islamic civilization, Arab and Muslim historians, scholars, and artists have made a clear distinction between writing and calligraphy. For example, the famous Arabian historian and philosopher Ibn Khaldoon (1332-1406) explains that writing consists of shapes and lines referring to the spoken words expressing what we want to say (as explained in Hanash, 1998, p. 20). Calligraphy, on the other hand, “makes statement about a particular society, a statement about the sum total of its cultural and historical heritage” (Gaun, 1994, p. 19).

Calligraphy also demonstrates the attitude of a society toward writing and the importance of text in daily life. Arabic calligraphy “provides images that have cultural, social, and historical significance which is impossible to duplicate in any other way” (Sakkal as stated in Anayat Durrani, 2002). Alnajdi (2001) believes that traditional Arabic calligraphy “perfectly” expresses the identity of Islamic culture and “effectively” promotes the Muslims’ inherited beliefs and traditions (p. 40).
Calligraphy, Arabic Language, and the Qur’an

One can not discuss Arabic calligraphy without addressing its connection with the Arabic language and the Qur’an, the Holy Book of Muslims. The development of Arabic calligraphy gained its significance only after the rise of Islam in the seventh century. According to Islam, God revealed His words, the Qur’an, in Arabic. The archangel Gabriel transmitted them to the Prophet Mohammed, also in Arabic, whereupon they were written down. From that time on, the Arabic language and its script (calligraphy) gained a new status. They were considered “a divine gift” (Gaun, 1994, p. 105).

Since the holy book of Muslims, the Qur’an, was to be written, Caliphs and leaders of the Islamic state have given much consideration and respect to the art of calligraphy. Without a doubt, writing the Qur’an has played a major role in the development of the Arabic calligraphy. It has always been considered the noblest form of art because of its association with writing of the Qur’an. Creating an appropriate visual representation of Arabic language worthy of writing the Qur’an was the Muslim calligraphers’ and artists’ honor and duty. Calligraphy developed into an occupation of great importance and Arabic scripts underwent an extraordinary development. Since then, thousands of calligraphic styles have been created.

The Pen and the Qur’an

In the beginning of the revelation of Islam, the words writing and pen are stated several times in the Qur’an. For example, in Sura 96, God appears as He “who taught man by the pen,” and the first words of Sura 68 read: “Nun, and by the Pen!” (Schimmel, 1984, p. 78). Allah also stated in Sura 31, “And if all the trees on the earth became pens,
and all the oceans ink, the words of thy Lord would not be exhausted” (Schimmel, 1984, p. 82). Moreover, according to the Qur’an, “everything, the Koran [Qur’an] holds, has been written from all eternity on the lauh al-mahfuz, the Well-preserved Table, by means of the preexistent Pen” (Schimmel, 1984, p. 78). Further, Muslims believe that “all man’s actions are written on the Tablet” (Schimmel, 1984, p. 78). It has been also stated in Sura 83/11 that “the kiram katibin, the noble scribe-angels, … sit on man’s shoulders to note down all his actions and thoughts, and on Doomsday finally his book will be presented” (Schimmel, 1984, p.80; King Faisal Center, 1986).

Since Allah’s angels act as scribes, it is not surprising that calligraphers have regarded their profession as highly sacred and significant. These references to writing, the Pen, and the Table have given the art of calligraphy and writing a significant status in Islamic culture.

**Calligraphy and the Prophet Mohammed**

According to an often quoted hadith (Prophetic tradition), The Pen is “the first thing that God created” (Schimmel, 1984, p. 79). The Prophet Mohammed also stated that “he [calligrapher] who writes the basmalah [in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful] well will obtain innumerable blessings and enter Paradise” (Gaur, 1994, p. 105). *Al-basmalah* is used before chapter openings throughout the Qur’an, and Muslims write it at the beginning of all of their writings, and say it before starting most of their activities, including eating and drinking. Therefore, throughout the long history of calligraphy, *Al-Basmalah* has been an important statement written in numerous styles and on a variety of materials (see Figure 22). Achieving a degree of perfection in writing *Al-Basmalah* has always been the Muslim calligraphers’ passion.
Figure 22: Calligraphic styles used in writing *Al-Basmalah*. 
Expression and Subject Matter in Arabic Calligraphy

Calligraphy and Art Expression

Throughout the Islamic world, reaching as far west as Spain and as far east as India, Arabic calligraphy has been “a symbol representing unity, beauty, and power” (Safadi, 2002, online). Shakkal (2002) also mentions that “Islam is the faith of unity, and the most obvious art form that expresses this unity is the calligraphy of Arabic script” (online).

As Arabic calligraphy is the primary form of art for Islamic visual expression and creativity, the cultural values of the Muslims are reflected in its aesthetic principles. For example, Islam and the Prophet Mohammed’s tradition stress the importance of brotherhood and solidarity between Muslims regardless of race or culture. Such solidarity between Muslims has been expressed by Muslim calligraphers and artists in their artworks. For example, a basic examination of Arabic calligraphy will reveal the various creative approaches to connecting letters and words, as expression of closeness and solidarity. The knotting and intertwining of certain letters and words in the Kufi style, the complexity of interlaced letters and words in the Jali Thuluth style, and the use of a swash end in the final letter of a word as a link to the initial letter of the following word in the Tawqii and Musalsal styles, all may reveal Muslim calligraphers’ attempts to express unity and connection (see Figure 23). These principles are also strongly and clearly expressed in Arabian ornamentation and Arabesque

Intellectual Aspect of Arabic Calligraphy

In general, the significance of a work of art is determined not only by its visual quality but also by the intellectual messages it carries. Intellectual messages are even
more relevant to the arts of a religious and intellectual society, such as Islamic and Arabic civilizations. Muslims calligraphers have *always carefully* selected phrases and words for their calligraphy artworks and compositions. The contents of Arabic calligraphy are usually passages from the Qur’an, traditions of the Prophet Mohammed, famous poems, and other important texts. Therefore, calligraphy may also have educational intentions. It may be that Arabic calligraphy has gained its significance in Islamic culture not only from its aesthetic visual characteristics, but also from the content and the intellectual quality it carries.

Figure 23: Samples of connecting letters in calligraphic styles, from top to bottom: Musalsal, Thuluth, Tawqi, Diwani, and Knotted Kufi.
Interpretation of Arabic Calligraphy

Lukens (1965) states that “the purely decorative potentials in calligraphy appealed strongly to the Islamic taste, and it is this predilection for the abstract that characterizes the whole of Islamic art” (p. 1). Therefore, it is incorrect to assume that the purpose of Islamic art and Arabic calligraphy is purely decorative or ornamental.

Moreover, the Western perspective may not be the best for interpreting the visual and conceptual complexity found in Islamic art and Arabic calligraphy. Substantial differences between fundamental principles of Western ideology and Islam (as the Muslims’ religion and system of living) call for different methods to examine and interpret Arabic calligraphy and Islamic art. Gaur (1994) explains that:

Outsiders often speak of the abstract beauty of Arab calligraphy but, from the Islamic point of view, calligraphy has nothing to do with art or abstraction. It is at the very center of the spiritual and political life of the people. In the Koran [Qur’an] the word of Allah [God] is revealed through the Arab language written down in Arabic characters. Calligraphy is thus part of a sacred bureaucracy designed to impress on society a political order based on the Koran [Qur’an] (p. 98).

Role of Calligraphy

Calligraphy Artworks as Treasures

The art of calligraphy was never an anonymous art form in the Muslim world. Gaur (1994) points out that “the names, dates and achievements of famous calligraphers have been carefully recorded and handed down since the 7th century” (p. 103). Numerous calligraphic artworks have been kept in museums, mosques, and libraries throughout Islamic and Arabic countries and in the United States and Europe. Not only were finished calligraphy artworks preserved but also exercise sheets of the great masters, such as Hafiz
Osman, were kept as works of art in themselves. Kings are known to treasure famous the pens of calligraphers. For example, the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir had boxes filled with pens used by famous calligraphic masters such as Ibn Muqla and Ibn al-Bawwab (Gaur, 1994).

**Kings and Calligraphy**

The often quoted Arabic maxim, “al-khatt [calligraphy] is adornment for the prince, perfection for the wealthy, and wealth for the poor,” clearly shows the significance of the art of calligraphy in the Islamic world (Schimmel, 1984, p. 53). Calligraphy has attracted numerous Muslim Caliphs and rulers since the early stages of Islam in the seventh century. Many rulers were known for their beautiful handwriting and calligraphy. For example, Mu’awiya (reigned 661-680AD) was a calligrapher, and it is said that the Prophet himself gave him instructions on enhancing his writing of al-basmalah.

According to Gaur (1994), almost every Sultan in Turkey was a skillful calligrapher or calligraphy patron. Sultan Ahmad III was an accomplished calligrapher. Ottoman Sultan Mahamud II (d. 1839) was also a well-known calligrapher who received his ijaza (acknowledgment and permission given to a calligrapher to write his/her name on his works) from the master Mehmet Vasfi. Calligraphy artworks of Sultan Abdul Majid (d. 1861) can be seen in the mosques of Istanbul. He received his ijaza in the Thuluth style from the master Izzet Efendi. Without a doubt, the attention of rulers and Sultans has increased the cultural value of calligraphy in Islamic society.

**Role of Calligraphers**

The position of a calligrapher within a culture reflects the attitude of the society toward his craft. Throughout the development of Islamic civilization, masters of
calligraphy were regarded with high respect. Usually, they worked in the offices of rulers or Sultans, religious administrators, or financial leaders. Less skillful calligraphers were employed as teachers in imperial schools. In Ottoman Turkey, many good calligraphers reached the highest echelons of the religious establishment. For example, the calligrapher Mustafa Raqim (1787-1825) served as Qadi-askar (leader or administrator) of Rumeli.

Accomplished calligraphers were among the most admired and appreciated artists. When writing the Qur’an, beauty and perfection were desired and, therefore, only calligraphers were to write the Qur’an, not copyists who are less skillful. Calligraphers were most appreciated by kings and Sultans of Islamic States. For instance, after World War I, Egyptian King Fu’aad invited the Turkish master Aziz Rifai (1872-1934) to teach calligraphy in Egypt. Soon after, Aziz Rifai “became the true reviver of the modern Egyptian school of classical calligraphy” (Schimmel, 1984, p. 48).

Accomplished calligraphers were also given honorable titles such as “qudwat al-kuttab” (model of calligraphers), “qiblat al-kuttab” (point of orientation for scribes), or, particularly in Iran and India, “Jawahir raqam” (Jewel letters), “Zarrin qalam” (Golden pen), “Ambarim qalam” (Amber pen) and so forth (Schimmel, 1984, p. 51). In the 1608, Persian calligrapher Abd al-Haqq migrated to India and was soon honored for his talents and skills. After completing his calligraphy on the Taj Mahal, he was “raised to a fairly high level of Mughal nobility and awarded the title Amanat Khan” (Gaur, 1994, p. 103). The calligrapher Hafiz Osman was also praised by the famous classical Turkish poet Yahya Kemal in his poem “Kocamustafa Pasa,” where he called him “the prophet of penmanship” (Schimmel, 1984, p. 74).
Many stories tell of Sultans’ and kings’ admiration for their calligraphers. For instance, Shaykh Hamdullah al-Amasi (1436-1519), the greatest calligraphy master of the Ottoman period, was highly honored by Sultan Bayezid II, who used to hold the inkstand for his teacher, Shaykh al-Amasi (Schimmel, 1984, p. 71-72; Safadi, 1979, p.70). The last ruler of the Abbasid house, al Mustasim (d. 1258), studied calligraphy with his slave, Yaqut, the most respected master in the history of Arabic calligraphy (Schimmel, 1984). Sultan Mustafa II once said, “Never will there be another Hafiz Osman [his calligrapher and teacher]!” The calligrapher Osman replied, “your Majesty, as long as there are kings who hold inkstands for their teacher there will be more Hafiz Osmans!” (Schimmel, 1984, p. 74).

Women Calligraphers

Historically, women have been calligraphers in Islamic culture. For example, women in Maghrib (West North Africa) were told that they would have to write at least one Qur’an before they could hope to make a good marriage (Gaur, 1994, p. 106). In general, Muslim ladies from noble families were “often highly educated and skilled with the pen… some slave girls… became scribes and obtained important positions because of their ability to write a fine calligraphic hand” (Gaur, 1994, p. 106).

It has been said that the famous calligrapher Ibn al-Bawwab studied calligraphy from the daughter of Ibn Muqlah, Zaynab (d. 1178). Other examples of the many women calligraphers include Zebunisa (d. 1701 AD) and Aurangzeb, who was able to write three calligraphic styles with equal skill. Malika Jahan, Sultan Ibidem II (reigned 1580-1626 AD) wrote a Qur’an (preserved in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, Ireland) in bold and colorful letters. Mir Imad’s daughter, Gauharshad, was a noted calligrapher.
Moreover, many of the nineteenth century’s Turkish women calligraphers received *ijaza* from masters such as Mehmet Rasim Efendi.

**Calligraphy in Arabic Literature**

Calligraphy was not just a significant form of art but also “deeply rooted in the consciousness of the people [Muslims, and Arabs], irrespective of whether they themselves were skilled in it” (Gaur, 1994, p. 105). There are frequent references to calligraphy in the compendium of Arab folk tales, *the Arabian Nights*, such as in the First Qalander, a story of a monkey who wins the king’s heart because of his elegant calligraphy (Gaur, 1994, p. 105; Schimmel, 1984, p. 18).

Letters were used as metaphors in poetry. An example is the use of the letters *lam* and *alif* in a poem describing a close embrace between two lovers:

I saw you in my dream embracing me  
Like as the *lam* of the scribe embraces the *alif* (Welch, 1979, p. 25).

A number of poems have also drawn connections between beauty and calligraphy. The following poem makes use of Arabic letterforms to describe the beauty of a beloved’s face:

Between the two eyes (*ayn*) of the friend from the *nun* of the eyebrows to  
the *mim* (of the mouth)  
The nose has drawn an *alif* on the face of silver.  
No, no, I am wrong: by a perfect miracle  
The finger of the Prophet has split the moon in two halves  
(Schimmel, 1984, p. 108).

The famous and gifted calligrapher Ibn al-Bawwab (d. 1022 A.D.) wrote a unique treatise on calligraphy. He also wrote a poem about the art of teaching calligraphy, which is “considered the best in the field” (King Faisal Center, 1986, p. 30). The Minister and calligrapher, Ibn Muqlah (886-940 A.D.), also wrote about calligraphy in “*Risalah fi Ilm*
al-Katt wa al-Qalam” (A treatise on the Science of calligraphy and pen) which is preserved in the Institute of Manuscripts in Cairo, Egypt. The following is a section of Ibn Muqlah’s treatise explaining his method of letterform proportions that has been used for hundreds of years:

The relative proportion of letters should be mentally calculated and based on the principle that the Alif [first letter in the Arabic alphabet] is the diameter of circle. The [letter] Ra should be then be mentally estimated as a quarter of the circle and the [letter] Nun estimated as half the circle (King Faisal Center, 1986, p. 41).

Muhammed Ibn al-Hasan also wrote a book in 1503 on calligraphy, the “at-Tibi book” describing calligraphic types and styles (King Faisal Center, 1986, p. 30).

**Calligraphy as Primary Motif**

Arabic calligraphy has not only been used in writing the Qur’an, but has also been applied to objects of everyday use such as wall surfaces, furniture, the interiors and exteriors of mosques, coins, and tombs (see Figure 24). Calligraphy has also been incorporated into other Islamic art forms such as woodwork, ceramic, glass, and textiles. For example, the Thuluth and Kufi styles are commonly applied on Mihrabs (prayer-niches) in wood and marble. The Kufi style, because of its monumental and bold geometric shapes, is usually used in architecture, sometimes with elaborate geometric or vegetal embellishments (Sakkal, 2002, online).

Even though Arabesque (Arabian ornamentation) and other forms of art have been used to decorate mosques throughout Islamic and Arab nations, *calligraphy is the only* form of art used to decorate Al-Kiswah covering Al-Ka’bah. The calligraphy on Al-Kiswah is composed of Qur’anic passages made of gold and set in the complex Thuluth
calligraphic style (see Figure 20 on p. 49). The use of calligraphy on *Al-Kiswa* shows how calligraphy is a highly regarded form of art in Islamic culture.

![Image of calligraphy on various objects](image)

Figure 24: Calligraphy used on a glass mosque lamp (left), on a plate (top right), and on a tomb (bottom right).

**Learning and Teaching about Arabic Calligraphy**

Since the calligraphy profession has been highly respected in Muslim society, becoming a good calligrapher has never been an easy task. In order to become a calligrapher, long study with a master was required. In the past, a potential calligrapher usually began learning calligraphy at the age of 8 or 10.

According to the custom in Turkey, the first step in the process of learning Arabic calligraphy is achieving the degree of *sawwadahu*, “he sketched it.”

Later the calligrapher may sign his/her work with *mashaqahu*, “he practiced it” (Schimmel, 1984, p. 44-45). The disciple attains the highest rank in the profession, usually at the age of twenty, upon receiving the *ijaza*, “permission,” which allows the
calligrapher to sign with *katabahu*, “he wrote it.” In another words, *ijaza* marks the disciple’s transition from a student to a full-fledged calligrapher. As a custom, *ijaza* takes the form of the master calligrapher’s signature with a few sentences written on the graduate calligrapher’s calligraphy sample (see Figure 25).

While this tradition is still respectfully in practice, several educational institutions in Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, and some other Arab nations offer a diploma in Arabic calligraphy. However, *ijaza* is considered far more significant and is respected more highly than a diploma.

**New Calligraphy Movement**

It is encouraging to notice that, throughout the Islamic world, there is a new interest in calligraphy as a medium for art expression and creativity. The use of calligraphy in contemporary painting has been frequently adopted by artists from Iraq,
Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and many other Arab nation (see page 19-22 for discussion on the Al-Horofiah movement). This new trend and interest in calligraphy shows that the “Muslims are very much aware that the Arabic letters—the letters of the Koran—are their most precious heirloom” (Schimmel, 1984, p. 33).

**Changes in Calligraphy as a Social Practice**

**Calligraphy as an Everyday Life Communication Tool**

Throughout the long history of the Islamic state, calligraphy was not only a noble form of art but also a device for everyday communication. Artists and calligraphers have continued to practice the art of calligraphy in both traditional and contemporary forms (see Figures 1-4 on pp. 17-18). However, the use of calligraphy as an everyday communication tool was dramatically reduced since the introduction of mass production and printing. Some believe that traditional calligraphy has no use in today’s communication practices and calligraphers should be involved in type design, typography, and layout design. This view is based on the belief that handwriting is no longer an efficient method of communication. It has been replaced by printing and electronic technologies.

Consequently, “the calligrapher has lost a part of his role due to the changes that happened in… [the] cultural orientation of some Islamic/Arabic countries” (Massoudy, 2002, online). These changes might be results of the industrial advancement in Islamic and Arabic nations (e.g., adopting press technologies for mass production and the use of computers and the Internet).

Massoudy (2002), however, states that the “calligrapher is still a choice above printing” particularly in book-cover titles, newspaper titles, posters, and other advertising
materials (2002, online). He argues that, because of the nature of the Arabic writing system, digital typefaces are “very ordinary and monotone… [and] less appealing and attractive… [than handwritten calligraphy, so] the calligrapher will never be replaced by the modern means of reproduction” (Massoudy, 2002, online). In contrast, AbiFarès (2001) believes that “the tools of pen and ink, and the traditional dedication of calligraphers to their old masters, are no longer useful – in fact they are more of an obstacle” (p. 203). She goes on to say, “Arabic calligraphy is no longer sufficient to contemporary communication needs, nor appropriate to modern tools and media” (p. 203). Increasing interests in calligraphy in all Arab nations take many forms (see Figures 1-4 on page 17-18) and suggests that calligraphy is still an important artistic medium and communication tool.

**Use of Calligraphy Styles in the Past and Present**

According to Gaur (1994), *Siyaqad* was a calligraphy style that “combines complexity of lines with elements of cryptography to communicate important information within the same department [within the government]” (p. 98). This calligraphy style was created to be read (decoded) only by members of the same department. Tughra is an elegant and elaborate ornamental calligraphy style (see Figure 26). Its design was based on the names of the Sultans of Turkey and serves as signatures legitimizing official degrees. This style was intended to be used *only* by the Sultans, and any unauthorized imitation or use of the Tughra signatures may carry the death penalty. The examples of the uses of different Arabic calligraphy styles for different purposes are numerous.

Today, most Arabic calligraphers and type designers create their typefaces for specific applications. In advertisements, where handwritten calligraphy is more popular
Calligraphy in Advertisement

Currently, calligraphy continues to function not only as a highly prized ornament and decoration, but as a practical and useful mechanism. Handwritten calligraphy, for its uniqueness and flexibility, is widely used and preferred in commercial art and advertisements (e.g., print media, television, and the Internet). As the industry in Saudi Arabia expands and the demand for customized advertising materials increases, handwritten calligraphy and custom typefaces have been greatly utilized. They are often used in signage, logotype, and creation of corporate identity. However, in general graphic
design applications, digital typefaces are more appreciated for their low cost and ease of use in print productions.

*Changes in Calligraphy Education*

In the past, teaching and learning about Arabic calligraphy was given great consideration. Masters of calligraphy used to teach their students on an one-to-one basis and *ijazah* (acknowledgement and permission given to the potential calligrapher to write his/her name on their calligraphy artworks) were granted when a calligrapher achieved a high level of proficiency. Currently, while *ijazah* is still highly regarded, the one-on-one teaching and leaning approach is less common in Arab countries. This practice of learning and teaching has been replaced with public and private schools of calligraphy. Several calligraphy institutes have been established in Egypt, Iraq, and other Arab countries.

In Saudi Arabia, the Institute of Calligraphy was established in the mid- 1970s to teach calligraphy. The curriculum consisted of four years of studying calligraphy in the traditional way. Many students graduating from this program became professional calligraphers and designers. However, the Ministry of Education closed the Institute in the late 1980’s. In the early 1990’s, a small private school was founded in Riyadh to teach calligraphy. Currently, this school is the only school in the country providing calligraphic training.

In Saudi Arabia, students at elementary and junior high schools receive one hour of calligraphy education per week. Usually, art or reading instructors teach calligraphy classes. Students are provided with a small handbook containing some fine calligraphy
artworks for students to copy. Currently, typography and type design are still not taught anywhere in the country.

**Calligraphy and Religion and Politics**

The Qur’an is no longer handwritten but printed strictly in black color using only the traditional Naskh style with headings in the Thuluth or Kufi styles. The Saudi government established the King Fahad Printing Press for printing the Qur’an. With governmental permission, King Fahad Printing Press distributes Qur’ans to all Arab and Islamic countries, usually free of charge. Currently, printed Qur’ans are less illuminated and decorated than old handwritten ones.

Qur’anic passages printed in books or documents are usually set in traditional Naskh. In rare cases, simplified Naskh typefaces are used, but never other traditional calligraphy styles or contemporary typefaces.

Traditional calligraphy is still handwritten and used for headings in important governmental or royal documents. For example, the traditional Thuluth style is still considered the royal style and is *usually* used in writing the names of royal family members in Saudi Arabia. Traditional Thuluth is also used in the national flag of the country (see Figure 20 on page 49). The traditional Diwani style is also treated as a royal style and is used when a less formal but elegant and distinctive quality is needed.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study investigates the education and practice of calligraphy in Saudi Arabia and develops some recommendations and suggestions for improvement. This research also provides an in-depth understanding of the cultural, artistic, and technical obstacles involved in advancing the education and practice of calligraphy and typography in Saudi Arabia. Qualitative case study methodology is used for the investigation.

Case Study Research

Merriam (1988) states that case study is “often the best methodology … [when] understanding is sought in order to improve practice” (p. xiii). Case study investigations “can explain the reasons for a problem, the background of a situation, what happened, and why” (Merriam, 1988, p. 14). A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest… is in discovery rather than confirmation (Merriam, 1998, p. 19).
Case study method is also selected for this study for its heuristic quality. A case study can:

- Explain the reasons for a problem, the background of situation, what happened, and why.
- Explain why an innovation worked or failed to work.
- Discuss and evaluate alternatives not chosen.
- Evaluate, summarize, and conclude, thus increasing its potential applicability (Merriam, 1998, p.31).

Participants

All participants in this study consisted of nine Saudi professional calligraphers. These participants were selected for their involvement and experience in the education and practice of Arabic calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia. The participants were:

- Participant 1 (Omar): a self-taught calligrapher famous for his modern calligraphy styles. Omar has more than 25 years of experience as a calligrapher and logo designer. He is also the owner of a 25-year old well-known advertising company.

- Participant 2 (Majeed): an international award-winning calligrapher known for traditional style calligraphy artworks. He is a self-taught calligrapher with more than 30 years of calligraphy experience.

- Participant 3 (Abdo): owner of an advertising company. He graduated from the Calligraphy Institute in Riyadh mid 1970’s and has more than 30 years of calligraphy experience.

- Participant 4 (Zaki): owner of an advertising and graphic design company. He is also an art teacher at an elementary school in Riyadh. He has more than 16 years of calligraphy experience.

- Participant 5 (Hameed): owner of an advertising company. He graduated from the Calligraphy Institute in Riyadh in late 1970’s. He has more than 25 years of calligraphy experience.

- Participant 6 (Badr): owner of an advertising company. He graduated in the1980s from Institute of Calligraphy in Riyadh. He has more than 15 years
of calligraphy experience. He is also an art teacher at an elementary school in Riyadh.

• Participant 7 (Salem): owner of an advertising company and also an art supply and equipment store for sign-makers, specializing in neon tubing. Salem has more than 33 years of calligraphy experience. He graduated from the Calligraphy Institute in Riyadh in mid 1970’s.

• Participant 8 (Adel): owner of an advertising company. He has more than 15 years of calligraphy experience. He is also an art teacher at an elementary school in Riyadh.

• Participant 9 (Emad): co-owner of an advertising company who has more than three years of calligraphy experience.

Primary participants were selected according to the criterion-based method suggested by LeCompte and Preissle (1993). These authors recommend establishing criteria to guide identification suitable participants, then selecting participants meeting those criteria. Chein (1981) refers to this type of selecting method as “purposive sampling”, and Patton (1990) called it “purposeful sampling”, where participants “are called in precisely because of their special experience and competence” (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Purposeful sampling can also be defined as a sample of participants whose selection “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight [into a particular situation or problem] and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). The value of purposeful sampling “lies in selecting information-rich [participants] for study in depth. Information-rich [participants] are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Participants chosen using this process will be considered “primary” participants.
**Selection of primary participants.** Two primary participants were identified for this study. The first is Naseer Al-Maymoon, one of the most respected Arabic calligraphers in Arab countries. Al-Maymoon has received International awards for his traditional calligraphy artworks. The second primary participant is Saad Al-Zeyad, the owner and art director of a major advertisement company in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. He is also well known in the outdoor sign and graphic design industry for his contemporary calligraphy and design style. Selection of secondary participants are based on recommendations of these two participants.

**Selection of secondary participants.** A “reputational-participant selection” process is use to identify secondary participants (Merriam, 1988, p. 61). In reputational-participant selection, participants are chosen “on the recommendation of experienced experts in an area” (Merriam, 1988, p. 50). Experts (primary participants) used in this study will identify secondary participants.

The study also adopts an ongoing selection of participants and collecting documents known as theoretical sampling or selecting. Merriam (1998) explains this process as follows:

This type of sampling begins the same way as purposeful sampling, but the total [sample] is not selected ahead of time. … The researcher begins with initial sample [of participants] chosen for its relevance to the research problem. The data [gleaned from these participants] lead the investigator to the next document to be read, the next person to be interviewed, and so on. It is an evolving process guided by the emerging theory " (p. 63).

**Location of the Study**

Data for the study was collected during the summer and Fall of 2002 in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. Because Riyadh is a capital city, it is the largest and most
important industrial, commercial, educational and cultural city in the country. It is located at the center of Saudi Arabia with a population of approximately four million. Riyadh is also considered most representative of the graphic design and commercial industry.

**Methods of Data Collection**

Data was triangulated for this study. Guba (1981) points out that triangulating data or using “different methods… cross-check data and [assist in] interpretation” (p. 85). Four methods of data collection were used: semi-structured interviews, field notes, public documents, and follow-up questionnaires. Interviews, conducted with Saudi professional calligraphers and graphic designers, constitute the main source of data for the study. Field notes were taken during a meeting with a member of the Arabic Calligraphy Organization in Alqateef City (ACOAC), and visits to Alka-teb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy (AIIAC) and the Art Education Department at King Saud University (KSU) in Riyadh. Public documents were also collected during those visits. Additional data came from participants’ responses to follow-up questionnaires developed specifically to obtain answers to new questions raised after the initial interview data had been analyzed. These follow-up questionnaires were also used to clarify initial answers and verify interview findings.

**Interviews.** An official letter from the General Administration for Staff and Personnel Affairs at King Saud University permitting data for the research to be collected was requested. The researcher upon receipt of this letter contacted participants personally and assigned a time for interviews.

Face-to-face interview is an appropriate method to collect opinions and perspectives of participants because “data [is] collected firsthand, directly from the
subject under study” (Rea and Parker, 1997, p. 2). Interviews followed a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for this study because they “are guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time” (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). The advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that they “allow the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 1998, p. 74).

Combinations of unstructured, semi-structured, and structured questions were utilized. Hypothetical, devil's advocate, ideal position, and interpretive questions were used in order to elicit information, opinions, feelings, beliefs, insights and perspectives from participants (Merriam, 1998). For example, after asking participants to respond to the question: *Is there a need for establishing schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design in the country?* A follow (probing) hypothetical question may have been: *Suppose it is my first day in a calligraphy school, what would it be like?* A devil's advocate question could have been: *Some people would say that only traditional calligraphy should be taught in schools, what would you say to them?* An ideal position question might have been: *What do you think the ideal calligraphy curriculum would be like?* An interpretive question may have been: *Would you say that establishing calligraphy schools in the country would improve advertising industry in the country?*

The interview questions followed a “funnel sequence”. Walizer and Wienir (1978) explain that “the funneling procedure starts at a very general level and, with subsequent probing questions, gets increasingly more specific” (p. 288). This method also allowed the researcher to provide participants with foundational information prior to
asking specific questions. In so doing, participants were more prepared and knowledgeable to respond in meaningful ways to increasingly specific questions.

*Aided-recall* procedures were used in conjunction with the interview questions. Aided recall is said to reduce the respondent's errors due to memory, motivation, communication or knowledge (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982). This method provides “one or more memory cues to the respondent when behavior or knowledge questions are asked. Specific procedures include the use of lists, pictures, household inventories, and specific detailed questions” (p. 289). In this study, visual aids were used throughout the interview to ensure participants clearly understood interview questions. In some instances, images of artworks were used to explain art concepts and definitions to participants while in other instances illustrations and sketches were also used.

Interview questions consisted of the following:

1. Are there any difficulties or problems facing calligraphers working in advertising in Saudi Arabia? If yes, what are these difficulties? What are the causes of these difficulties? And how can they be overcome?

2. In your opinion, do you think that Arabic fonts available on the market meet the advertising and graphic design needs of the industry? If not, please explain.

3. Do you think there a need for modifying traditional Arabic calligraphy styles in order to make them more compatible with today’s communication advertising technology such as that used with computers, printing methods, internet, and outdoor signage?

4. Is there a need for improving computer or digital Arabic fonts? What are your suggestions for improvement?

5. In your opinion, how important is it to represent of Islamic and Arabic identity in digital typefaces and modern calligraphy used in advertisements?

6. Do you think it is possible to introduce some major modifications to Arabic traditional calligraphy styles without having a negative impact on their Islamic and Arabic distinctive appearance?
7. In your opinion, why do some Saudi calligraphers and graphic designers tend to build their Arabic typefaces based on Western typefaces’ designs?

8. Do you think that traditional Arabic calligraphy styles should remain in their traditional forms in view of increasing demands for a more modern look in today’s communications and advertising typeface applications?

9. Which typeface or group of typefaces do you believe represent the identity of Islamic and Arabic culture best? Please, explain how you reached your conclusion.

10. Which typeface/typefaces do you believe contain modifications that cause loss of Islamic and Arabic identity? Can you identify those changes? How would you redesign these typefaces to better represent Islamic and Arabic cultural identity, (what would you delete, alter, add, and keep)?

11. How acceptable are the typefaces of group “C” for printing the Qur’an? If group C typefaces are not suitable, explain why.

12. Is it appropriate to typeset Qur’anic verses in Ahmed typeface? If not, please explain why.

13. Do you think that teaching calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia meets the professional needs of the advertising industry?

14. Are you satisfied with the level of calligraphy education in Saudi Arabia? Please, explain how you come to your conclusion.

15. How can teaching calligraphy in Saudi Arabia be improved?

16. Is there a need for establishing schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia?

17. How can the calligraphy profession in Saudi Arabia be improved?

18. In your opinion, what characteristics should today’s calligrapher have in order to successfully work in the advertising and graphic design professions in Saudi Arabia.

19. Are there any artistic and/or design principles that should be maintained when designing new Arabic fonts or typefaces representing Islamic and Arabic cultural identity?
Field notes. Field notes came from three sources: (a) notes were taken during the interviews and follow-up questionnaire meetings; (b) notes were taken during visits to the Arabic Calligraphy Organization in Alqateef City (ACOAC), Alka-teb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy (AIIAC), and the Art Education Department at King Saud University (KSU) in Riyadh; (c) sketches and diagrams were drawn of classroom arrangements in the AIIAC; (d) notes were taken during personal communication with a member of ACOAC and instructors at AIIAC and KSU.

Documents. The majority of documents for this study were obtained from the Arabic Calligraphy Organization in Alqateef City (ACOAC), Alka-teb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy (AIIAC), and the Art Education Department at King Saud University in Riyadh. Published articles were also examined. Governmental or institutional documents (e.g., graduation documents and instructor's handouts or recommendations) from participants were considered as well. A number of calligraphic artworks by participants were also examined.

Questionnaire. Follow-up questionnaires were specifically developed for each participant. The questionnaires were divided into two sections. First section applied a structure laying technique (SLT) Flick (1998). SLT aids participants in checking the researcher's interpretation of their responses to questions and other statements during initial interviews. SLT was conducted by means of a second interview ten days after the first interview. Flick (1998) summarizes using the structure laying technique as follows:

In the second meeting, the interviewee's… [responses] are presented to him or her as concepts on small cards… to assess the contents. [Then] the interviewee is asked to recall the interview and check if its contents are correctly represented on the cards. If this is not the case, he or she may
reformulate, eliminate and/or replace… [responses] with other[s that are] more appropriate (p. 84).

The second section of the follow-up questionnaire consisted of clarifying questions that arose during data analysis of initial interviews. These new questions were close-ended. Images, illustrations, and artworks were also utilized in asking these questions when it was necessary.

**Methods of Data Analysis**

**Global analysis.** Data were analyzed using two methods. First, *global analysis* was used as a practical method for preparing data for other analytic procedures (Flick, 1998). The aim of global analysis is to “obtain an overview of the thematic range” of the data collected (Flick, 1998, p. 196). Then data were analyzed using content analysis (Flick, 1998).

**Content analysis.** Content analysis is used to analyze large quantities of data. It is a classical procedure for analyzing interview data. Three content analysis techniques were used. First, *summary content analysis* was used to reduce the large amount of data collected. This technique paraphrases original material, omits less relevant materials, eliminates redundancies, and drops passages with the same meaning (Flick, 1998). Second, *explicative content analysis* was used. Explicative content analysis “clarifies diffuse, ambiguous or contradictory passages by involving content material [interviews' contents] in the analysis” (Flick, 1998, p. 194). Third, *structured content analysis* was used to construct categories or themes based upon concepts revealed by the data (Flick, 1998).
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

Findings presented in this chapter come from four main sources. The first set of findings were collected from a visit to Alka-teb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy (AIIAC) in Riyadh and also from an informal interview with a calligraphy teacher at the institute. Data about the Institute were also collected from the Institute’s brochure and other printed materials collected at the site.

The second source of data was collected from the Calligraphy Organization in the Saudi city of Alqateef. These data were obtained from a member of the organization and from the organization’s printed materials (i.e., brochures and art exhibition catalogues).

The third data source consisted of interviews with nine professional Saudi calligraphers. The interviews were audio-recorded while the researcher took notes. The fourth source of data was comprised of calligraphers’ responses to written questionnaires completed by the nine participants after the initial interview data was analyzed.

Findings of the study are presented in three sections:

• Alka-teb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy (AIIAC).

• The Calligraphy Organization in Alqateef.
Alkaateb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy (AIIAC)

AIIAC and Its Mission

Alkaateb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy (AIIAC) opened in the early 1990’s in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. AIIAC is the first and only private educational institution in the country for teaching traditional Arabic calligraphy. The enrolment is open only to boys starting at an early age, approximately 10 years old. AIIAC is open Saturdays to Wednesdays from 9:00 a.m. to noon and also from 4:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. The Institute is also open on Thursday mornings to allow students who miss a class during the week to make up assignments. It is closed from noon to 4:00 p.m. Saturdays to Wednesdays.

According to the AIIAC brochure and handouts, the AIIAC has three goals:

- to make students’ handwriting more legible and beautiful
- to teach calligraphy skills and methods in all calligraphy styles
- to improve students’ spelling

Course Focus and Teaching Philosophy

The AIIAC provides courses in three subjects: Arabic calligraphy, Islamic ornamentation, and spelling principles and grammar. Each course ranges in levels from basic to advanced. A student can advance his skills by enrolling in the next higher level or by repeating the same course but practicing more complex assignments. Mr. Sadeq, a calligraphy teacher at AIIAC, explains how students advance their calligraphy skills:

We teach only the practical aspects of calligraphy: how to do it. Students advance in the art of calligraphy just by continuing to practice one-on-one
with me with more complex calligraphy works and sentence compositions and also trying to perfect their letterforms in all variations of forms and styles. Students are also encouraged to come as close as possible to the master calligraphy artworks produced hundreds of years ago. I always try to explain to students that it is important to copy the calligraphy masterpieces as many times as they can (personal interview, November 2002).

Mr. Sadeq also mentioned that calligraphy courses also provide: (a) the study of letterforms and their several variations, (b) the study of connecting letters with each other in a variety of styles, and (c) the practice of writing words in several forms followed by composing sentences in several calligraphy styles.

Each calligraphy course is four weeks in length and costs 600 Saudi Riyals (approximately $160 US dollars). Classes run five days a week for about an hour in length.

To enroll in classes at AIIAC, a student must fill out an application form, bring two photographs of themselves along with a copy of identification, have successfully completed fourth grade, and be at least ten years old. Students under the age of sixteen usually study together in classrooms that are separated from those of older students. At the end of each course, each student receives a letter of completion rather than a diploma or letter grade.

The Teachers and Classrooms

There are only two full-time instructors at AIIAC: Mr. Mustafa from Egypt and Mr. Saadeq from Sudan. Currently, each instructor teaches only six months a year, spending the other six months vacationing in his home country. According to Mr. Saadeq, both teachers at AIIAC teach “in very similar methods” (personal communication, November 2002).
There are three classrooms at the AIIAC. The size of each classroom is approximately six yards by five yards and designed to hold to sixteen students. Each student has a wooden chair with a small desk, approximately 17” by 30”. A large blackboard with white and colored charcoal for writing calligraphy is provided in each classroom. Furniture arrangement within classrooms is traditional for schools of its kind (see Figure 27).

Figure 27: AIIAC Classrooms.
Teaching at AIIAC is practiced in a traditional manner. The teacher writes some letterforms or words on the board and the students practice copying them. The teacher then corrects the students’ work. Students are often given homework assignments on the letterforms or words they did not perform well in class. Mr. Saadeq states that most students who want to improve their calligraphy skills generally take four to five courses offered by the school.

There are no teaching aids such as computers, over-head projectors, slides, or VCRs in the classrooms. When I asked Mr. Saadeq about the use of instructional or visual aids, he said he only brings some calligraphy books for students to look at. He believes calligraphy books are more useful than computers or teaching tools. Mr. Saadeq also added the following:

It is important to know that students do not take the AIIAC courses to become professional calligraphers but to improve their handwriting. If one wants to be a professional calligrapher, he has to take classes in the history of calligraphy and other theoretical and aesthetic classes that the AIFIC does not offer. They also need to spend more time studying calligraphy than just an hour a day at AIIAC. (personal interview, November 2002)

Most students in calligraphy classes use either black calligraphy markers or reed pens made of bamboo. Students who are interested in making their own calligraphy bamboo pens receive instructions from their teacher. Standard instructions for making calligraphy pens include choosing the right type of bamboo, curving, cutting, and smoothing the pen tip. Students usually write on extra-smooth white paper. Calligraphy materials are provided by AIIAC for students free of charge.
Some students consider calligraphy courses art activities they would enjoy in the summer when schools are not in session. This explains the large increase in the number of students taking AIIAC courses in the summer.

**Arabic Calligraphy Organization in Alqateef City (ACOAC)**

Calligraphy organizations in Saudi Arabia have not been established until very recently. On November 15, 2000, the Arabic Calligraphy Organization (ACOAC) was founded in Alqateef, a city in northwestern Saudi Arabia. This calligraphy organization is a non-profit organization founded and registered as part of the Social Service Center in the city. As of 2002, it is the only established calligraphy organization in Saudi Arabia.

The mission of ACOAC, as stated in the organizations’ brochure, is to improve the artistic taste of the public in Saudi Arabia. The major objectives of ACOAC are as follows: (a) to provide a place for professional and potential calligraphers to meet, (b) to hold calligraphy exhibitions, (c) to provide workshops and courses for students to learn about calligraphy, and (d) to organize lectures on traditional Arabic calligraphy.

Since its establishment in 2000, ACOAC has provided several calligraphy workshops for the public and held three calligraphy exhibitions in Alqateef. ACOAC has also arranged two major public lectures on Arabic calligraphy. Guest speakers were calligrapher Saleman Akbar from Bahrain and the well-known American calligrapher Mohamed Zakariya.

In 2001, ACOAC provided a workshop on the traditional Naskh calligraphy style. Twenty-nine students attended the workshop. Calligraphy workshops at the ACOAC are designed to teach only traditional calligraphy styles such as Naskh, Thuluth, Riq’a, Farsi, and Diwani. Students attending the workshop used reed pens, black ink, and smooth
white paper to produce calligraphy artworks. The art materials used by students at ACOAC are very similar to the ones used by professional calligraphers.

ACOAC has organized a few calligraphy art exhibitions in Alqateef. The calligraphy artworks exhibited by ACOAC follow traditional styles where black ink on white paper is used and Thuluth, Naskh, and Farsi styles are utilized, at times decorated with a few Islamic ornaments. The approach used by calligraphers at ACOAC has been practiced for hundreds of years in Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, and other Arabian countries. Preserving this tradition is one of the objectives of the Calligraphy Organization in Alqateef.

**Interview Questions and the Questionnaires**

**Introduction**

Nine professional Saudi calligraphers participated in this study. To protect confidentiality of the participants and information, Arabic pseudonym names have been substituted for the real names of participants (see chapter 3, pp. 75-76). The majority of participants own advertising agencies or outdoor sign shops. A few are public school art teachers with more than fifteen years of experience.

The interviews were tape-recorded. Handwritten notes were also taken by the researcher during interviews. The researcher asked each participant the same set of questions (see chapter 3, pp. 80-81). In some instances, during interviews, participants answered questions before they were asked. In other situations, it was important to reorder interview questions to follow a participant’s line of reasoning or logic.

For the purpose of presenting responses to the interview questions and questionnaires in an easy-to-understand and organized format, questions related to the
same theme are grouped together and discussed under six descriptive categories: (1) Difficulties and Problems Facing Saudi Calligraphers, (2) Arabic Digital Typefaces, (3) Modification to Traditional Calligraphy, (4) Representation of Identity in Type Design, (5) Calligraphy Education in Saudi Arabia, (6) and Improving Calligraphy and Advertising Professions.

**Difficulties and Problems Facing Saudi Calligraphers**

Participants identified a number of difficulties and problems facing Saudi calligraphers. These difficulties/problems comprised six categories:

1) Communication Difficulties
2) Creative Difficulties
3) Financial Difficulties
4) Administrative Difficulties
5) Employee Difficulties
6) Cultural and Religious Difficulties

**Communication Difficulties**

*Unfamiliar vocabulary*: Seven of the nine participants (Omar, Badr, Abdo, Hameed, Emad, Zaki, and Adel) express difficulties discussing design and aesthetic issues with their clients. The seven participants agree with Omar who states “a number of clients do not know or understand what they want; I always have to explain what is good for their project, and it takes so long for them to understand and agree with what I suggest” (interview, December 2002).

Seven participants (Omar, Salem, Emad, Abdo, Badr, Hameed, and Zaki) agree that the major reason for communication difficulties with clients is due to the clients’ lack
of art and design background. Zaki explains that “most clients in Saudi Arabia, in
general, have little or no background in art or design, and this makes it very difficult for
me to explain design issues to them or convince them with my designs.” Badr points out
another negative outcome of his clients’ lack of art background. He explains, “most of
my clients do not understand artistic aspects in artworks. Therefore, they are more likely
to not appreciate the art that I create for them” (interview, December 2002).

A few solutions for this problem were suggested. Eight of nine participants agreed
that one “effective” solution would be to establish additional art and calligraphy institutes
throughout the country. Seven participants suggested promoting and organizing more
calligraphy exhibitions in Saudi Arabia to increase the public’s art and design
background and awareness. Four participants (Emad, Badr, Omar, and Salem)
recommended offering more calligraphy workshops for the public. Salem suggested
organizing public lectures and publishing articles on calligraphy in newspapers. Zaki
believes that developing some art and design television programs would increase public
knowledge about design and calligraphy. Badr suggested that calligraphy books should
be less expensive and more available in the market to encourage the public to buy and
read them. All the suggested solutions aim, in general, at exposing the public to more art,
design, and calligraphy. In doing so, they hope to raise the public level of understanding
and appreciation of calligraphy.

**Convincing clients to accept new design ideas.** Zaki, Omar, and Hameed express
difficulties in obtaining approval from clients when they present unfamiliar or new design
concepts. Omar states that “the big problem is that some clients do not appreciate new
approaches in design and calligraphy” (interview, December 2002). Zaki, Omar, and
Hameed believed that the clients’ “poor” background in art creates this difficulty. These participants recommend improving art and design education in the nation to overcome this problem.

**Negotiating the cost of artworks.** Six participants (Zaki, Hameed, Omar, Badr, Emad, and Adel) face major difficulties, particularly in coming to an agreement with clients on the cost of projects. These designers and calligraphers revealed that their clients often negotiate repeatedly to lower the cost of their orders. These six participants agree with Omar who states “convincing clients with price has become difficult these days” (interview, December 2002). Badr and Emad express similar concerns.

Participants believe that the majority of their clients do not know how to estimate the costs of projects and the price always seems overly high. Emad believes that this problem can be blamed upon the inability of clients “to distinguish between good work and bad work. They are not even aware of the good materials I use for their work” (interview, December 2002).

Five participants (Hameed, Omar, Badr, Abdo, and Adel) agree that there are many “unqualified foreign designers” and calligraphers who attract clients by reducing the price but produce poor work. These participants agree with Hameed that “this practice causes clients to assume that we overprice the work we do.”

Emad and Badr support Omar, and also note another possible cause for clients’ concern about overpriced work. Omar believes that clients are not aware of the differences in quality of “the creative design and calligraphy ideas, material types, finishing techniques, and installation approaches I put in their outdoor signs.” Omar also
argues that the costs of creating design and calligraphy works differs significantly among calligraphers, and this factor has also contributed to existence of the problem.

As a solution to convince clients that prices are fair, Hameed, Emad, and Omar recommend that designers and calligraphers explain to clients about the hours of work involved in creating exceptional designs and the cost of high-quality materials used in artworks and signs. This clarification and explanation would assist clients in understanding the complexity of the work and effort involved. As a result, clients would be better able to appreciate and value the designs and projects in general.

Hameed and Omar also suggest that “the government should not allow unqualified or foreign calligraphers who do not speak the Arabic language to open their own businesses or work at established graphic design agencies or sign shops in the country.” Omar goes on to suggest that the Ministry of Broadcast should classify sign shops and advertising agencies based on their specialties and capabilities. He suggests an A, B, C, and D ranking system where an “A” rank (within its classification of specialty) is the highest or most capable company to carry out complex and major design work.

*Obtaining the clients’ confidence and trust.* Four participants (Zaki, Abdo, Omar, and Hameed) state that some of their clients, during their first visit, have little confidence in the calligraphers doing the artwork, especially when it comes to creating logos and other graphic design works. Abdo explains that, “the problem is that there are some unqualified people working as calligraphers and designers. This definitely makes people lose trust in the calligraphers’ artistic abilities” (interview, December 2002). Omar explains that “most clients believe that only graphic designers can do logo and graphic
work, but there are some calligraphers who have proven that they can do both
[calligraphy and logo design]” (interview, December 2002).

Zaki and Adel agree with Abdo, who suggests that “the most effective way to
obtain the clients’ trust and confidence in the calligrapher’s ability is to do some
calligraphy in front of the clients. If they see you creating a beautiful calligraphy in front
of them, they will surely have confidence in your ability” (interview, December 2002).

**Creative Difficulties**

**Obtaining quality materials and supplies.** Only Adel expresses difficulties in
obtaining quality materials and supplies for his projects. He emphasizes that “there are
many types of materials and supplies on the market. This makes us [calligraphers]
confused about which is good and which is not.” When I ask Adel about a suggestion for
this problem, his answer was: “I do not know, maybe I will just go with what most people
[calligraphers and designers] use” (interview, December 2002).

**Drawing and graphic design skills.** Seven of the nine participants (Zaki, Hameed,
Omar, Abdo, Adel, Badr, and Emad) express difficulties in producing logos and other
works that contain drawings. They all agree that this problem is due to the calligraphers’
lack of background in drawing and design.

Hameed notes that when he began as an outdoor sign maker, he had difficulties in
creating logos, but it has become easier over time. He believes that “practice is the way to
go.” Abdo explains that “logos and graphics need creative graphic designers and not
calligraphers. We [calligraphers] do not know how to create logos except in Tughra style”
(interview, December 2002).
Badr explains that the insufficient skill of Saudi calligraphers in creating artwork requiring design elements can be traced to the fact that “they [calligraphers] are taught in traditional calligraphy schools, in particular the Egyptian schools of calligraphy which are old and useless.” Badr goes on to stress the importance of drawing skills for calligraphers working in the Saudi Arabia advertising industry:

Most calligraphers do not know how to draw, and this is a major problem. When you work in advertisement, sometimes there are projects where you have to draw or create a logo that requires some drawing skills… some calligraphers also do not understand the art of design and advertising. The fact that there are no art [and design] schools in Saudi Arabia creates these kinds of problems (interview, December 2002).

Most participants agree that an effective solution to this problem would be to establish fine art schools where students would be exposed to all visual arts including graphic design, calligraphy, drawing, and painting.

**Creating freehand calligraphy styles.** All participants stress the importance of using freehand calligraphy in advertising and commercial art. Participants agree that most of their clients favor freehand calligraphy over traditional calligraphy. Emad points out that “Freehand calligraphy is beautiful and it is the fashion now, most people like it.”

However, many calligraphers have difficulties creating freehand calligraphy. Hameed explains that “freehand was introduced in Saudi Arabia by one person, Saad [Al-Zeyad], in the outdoor signs he has made, and it took some time for people to appreciate it. Now all calligraphers imitate his styles in calligraphy.” Hameed was laughing when he goes on to say, “we all [Saudi calligraphers and sign makers] try to imitate and copy Saad Al-Zeyad’s freehand calligraphy styles. The best of us is the one who gets close to Al-Zeyad’s style” (interview, December 2002). Majeed notes the importance of freehand
calligraphy in the advertising industry and the struggle of calligraphers to create freehand
calligraphy. He explains:

Many traditional calligraphers these days shift to freehand calligraphy in
order to get a job or to make some money. Many calligraphers come to me
asking me to create some freehand calligraphic styles or even some letters
in a freehand style for them, because they can not create Freehand
calligraphy style as [Saad] Al-Zeyad does in his thousands of outdoor
signs in Riyadh and other cities in the country. Why [are they unable to
create satisfying freehand calligraphy?] There is nobody who teaches
freehand calligraphy; there are no reference books [on freehand
calligraphy] or methods to follow; freehand calligraphy is not taught in
calligraphy institutes or any other schools anywhere [in Arab countries].
Therefore, we [Saudi calligraphers] need help (interview, December
2002).

Causes and solutions given to the difficulty in creating Freehand calligraphy are
similar to those voiced by calligraphers who have difficulty creating logos and graphic
design artworks.

Clients’ over-involvement. Emad and Zaki state that they experience some
discomfort and disturbance when their clients become over-involved in the design
process. Zaki tells this story about one of his clients:

A client came and asked to have some flowers painted on his shop signs.
His shop has nothing to do with flowers. I told him it would not work, but
he insisted that I add a bunch of flowers in the work. So I did what he
asked me to do but I did not put my name on the work [it is a common
practice that a calligrapher signs his/her work with his/her name or
nickname] (interview, December 2002).

According to Zaki, his clients believed that the quality of work on the project
would improve if they participated in the design process. Emad states “clients sometimes
do not trust your artistic abilities and skills and believe that they can improve your
[calligraphers] design.” When I asked Zaki and Emad for a possible solution for this
problem, I did not get answer.
Misspellings in outdoor signs. Abdo, Majeed, Zaki, and Salem point out that there are misspellings in many outdoor signs and other advertising materials in Saudi Arabia. Salem offers a possible cause for this practice: “There are some Indians and Pakistanis working as calligraphers. Most of them do not read or write Arabic. Therefore, what they do is that they draw the letters or words instead of writing and it is likely that they misspell.” Abdo agrees:

There are some non-Arabs working as calligraphers, designers, and sign makers while they do not even know anything about the language. Most of them are Indians [from India]… The problem is not only that they may misspell some words, but it may be worse when their clients are also Indians [from India]… Then… neither client nor sign maker would be aware of or figure out the misspelling of the sign. This is really a serious problem (interview, December 2002).

Salem, Abdo, and Zaki suggest the following solution: The government should not allow a person who does not speak Arabic to hold a job, such as a calligrapher, where knowledge of the Arabic language is required. Abdo recommends that the owners of sign shops should be questioned and held responsible for “unacceptable practices.” He recommends that the Ministry of Broadcasting should ensure that “unacceptable practices” do not occur.

Creative calligraphy works. Four participants (Omar, Hameed, Badr, and Majeed) admit that it is somewhat difficult for them to “continuously produce creative calligraphic works” for advertising applications. Omar elaborates:

Now clients want creative new design ideas and modern calligraphy for their signs and advertising materials… I have some difficulties in coming up with new and modern ideas for every client. I also focus on making sure that my ideas are unique and suitable for contemporary and “modern” communications (interview, December 2002).

Majeed attributes existing difficulties in creating new calligraphy styles to the following:
Why hasn’t anyone created a new calligraphy style other than what we have known since the sixteenth century or so? In fact, God assigns creative abilities for certain people he creates. However, if anyone tries hard and makes an effort, he will achieve something. Still, the lack of patience and the fast pace of today’s life are the reasons behind the absence of new calligraphy styles in the wake of classical [traditional] styles. Many have tried to create new [calligraphy] styles that are as good as the classical ones, but they have failed. Why? Many have tried to figure out the reasons, but no one could. I do not know why creativity has started to disappear… God is the only creator and he grants his creativity to only some people (interview, December 2002).

Hameed’s explanation for this problem was that “all the creative calligraphers have died. Therefore, no more new quality calligraphy styles exist” (interview, December 2002). As far as for solutions for this problem, participants do not suggest solutions nor do they have recommendations.

**Use of computers and design software.** Most graphic designers and sign makers in Saudi Arabia use IBM-compatible computers with Windows operating systems. The use of Macintosh computers is only common in magazine and newspaper design publications. The most popular drawing programs used by calligraphers (working as sign makers) and designers are “EasySign” and “CorelDraw.” Adobe PhotoShop is widely used for image-editing and large-format commercial printing.

Three participants (Emad, Badr, and Hameed) face some obstacles in using computers and software. Emad states that he encounters some barriers while using his IBM-compatible computers and EasySign and PhotoShop software. He explains, “computers and software freeze, files get lost, or the computer sometimes does not start at all” (interview, December 2002).

Badr and Hameed reveal that they had some difficulties when they started using IBM-compatible computers and EasySign software a few years ago. However, Badr
thinks that using computers for creating calligraphy, designs, and drawings might be somewhat difficult in the beginning, but with practice anyone can learn and become proficient. He believes that some design and image-editing software are rather difficult to learn because one has to know some English to efficiently take advantage of software capabilities. He thinks that taking English classes at an institute of foreign languages would help. His “more sufficient solutions” are to use computers when young or to take computer classes. Hameed has been using EasySign drawing software for more than a decade and believes that now he has “almost full control of the software.”

Adel and Zaki believe that learning how to use computers is not a problem; it is only a matter of time. Adel says that since he started using his computer, designing becomes easier and production has increased. Although Abdo agrees, it is important to note that he does not know how to operate a computer and has never produced design or artwork using computer design or drawing software.

**Financial Difficulties**

Abdo and Majeed emphasize that some professional calligraphers may face financial difficulties and are unable to establish calligraphy shops. Abdo and Majeed also explain that “a calligrapher who already has a calligraphy shop or graphic design agency may not be able to improve his business because of financial difficulties” (interview, December 2002). Majeed goes on to say that, in his opinion, the situation may have a negative impact on graphic design and advertising industries in the country.

Both Abdo and Majeed suggest a possible solution for this problem. They recommend that government and non-government organizations financially assist calligraphers by offering loans, free equipment and supplies, and other financial supports.
Administrative Difficulties

Only Omar admits that he is facing substantive administrative barriers. He believes that the difficulties he encounters are very similar to, if not the same as, difficulties facing other sign makers and graphic design agencies.

He classifies the obstacles into four major groups. The first group consists of marketing and sales difficulties. The second group is related to difficulties in collecting payments from clients. The third group has to do with trouble scheduling and managing clients’ meetings and follow-ups. The fourth group consists of obstacles associated with production of sign-making, particularly in the making of large outdoor signs.

Omar identifies some causes of these administrative troubles. He believes that professional administrators are rare individuals in the country. He stresses that most individuals holding administration responsibilities in graphic design agencies do not have the background nor have they been sufficiently trained in their specialties (e.g., administration, accounting, and marketing). Omar explains:

Most employees working as salespersons, accountants, and managers at advertising companies are unqualified to do their jobs. They usually do not hold degrees in their areas of specialty. They hold old knowledge and information about their professions, especially in marketing and sales (interview, December 2002).

Omar suggests solving this problem by establishing some institutes and junior colleges that offer classes in business administration and marketing. Then, employees would be able to obtain some training at these institutes and/or attend some classes in administration, management, marketing, and related fields to enhance their skills and update their knowledge in how to be an effective administrator of a large calligraphy or design company.
Employee Difficulties

**Difficulties obtaining creative staff.** Badr and Omar, owners and art directors of major sign-making companies in Riyadh, describe searching for creative and educated calligraphers and designers as “a major problem.” Badr points out that “creative designers are very rare individuals in Saudi Arabia as well as in other Arabian countries. They also ask for high remuneration.” Omar explains his view on this problem:

It is so difficult to find creative and knowledgeable [individuals]… designers in Saudi Arabia are mainly Egyptians; they really need to understand the Saudis’ aesthetic sense, market, and consumer preferences. It is clear that there is a lack of successful and creative designers in Saudi Arabia and other Arabian countries. Hence, I started to hire designers who I do not consider to be qualified and creative because they are what is available to me. In most cases, I myself do the designs from scratch (interview, December 2002).

Both Badr and Omar agree that having no fine art schools in the county is the cause for this problem. Therefore, they believe that establishing schools for teaching graphic design would greatly contribute in solving the problem.

**Difficulties obtaining technical support staff.** Omar and Salem encounter some barriers while searching for qualified and well-trained technicians and electrical neon experts. Salem states that “there are no technicians whom I can call skillful and professional” (interview, December 2002). When I ask Omar and Salem about the causes and solutions to this problem, their answer is “it is hard, I do know.” Since technicians are usually foreigners, they are required to go through a process that includes obtaining VISAs and qualification reviews from Saudi officials and owners of authorized private companies. Therefore, Salem believes that the government should seek a solution to this “major problem.”
Religious and Cultural Issues

Abdo and Omar state that governmental and religious restrictions on incorporating human figures in graphics have limited their creativity. Omar explains that he is unable to make use of “human figures or faces, musical instruments, Western words, animals, and even some combinations of colors that may suggest certain thoughts and themes.” He gives some examples of color combinations that are likely to be taken as “improper practices, [such as] combining ruby red, reddish purple, and light bluish purple; they are likely to be taken as improper color combinations.” Omar believes that these color combinations may suggest an atmosphere of “Western bars or nightclubs” (interview, December 2002). Omar gives an example of religious and cultural restrictions:

Once, I used a part of an Islamic motif in a large neon sign for a restaurant (see Figure 31 on page 171). A couple of weeks later, Alhiyaah [a governmental religious organization] asked me to change the sign. They [officers of the organization] interpreted that motif as a Christian cross [symbolizing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ], and they asked me to change that part or cut it out. I showed them some pictures of Islamic art that are similar to the one I used, but they still were not convinced. Finally, the owner of the restaurant convinced them somehow.

Another example was when I used a drawing of a violin in a large outdoor neon sign for a music store. Alhiyaah again asked me to remove it. I talked with them for a long time and finally we arrived at the following arrangement: I cut the long part of the violin. The sign did not look as attractive as it did before [because part of the violin had been cut off] (interview, December 2002).

Abdo tells this story about the cultural and religious difficulties he has encountered:

Sometimes you have a design idea for a fried chicken restaurant logo that requires a drawing of the head of a chicken, but you are afraid that if you create the logo, you may be questioned by Alhiyaah… One time, I
designed an outdoor sign for a female beauty salon. I though of having a simplified drawing of a head of a woman on the corner of the sign but the Indian worker did not know what I meant and, of course, was not aware of the restrictions on such drawings. So, he drew the rest of the [female] body. It was a small sign, but Alhiyaah sent me an official letter requesting me to present myself at their office. After I was reprimanded, I had to sign a document stating that I would not create such designs in the future (interview, December 2002).

Abdo and Omar do not offer any suggestions to overcome such difficulties. They both agree that they try their best to follow governmental and religious restrictions. However, they wish to eliminate such restrictions on commercial art and on art in general.

**Arabic Digital Typefaces**

*Typefaces and the Saudi Graphic Design Industry*

In response to the question about whether Arabic digital typefaces meet Saudi advertising and graphic design needs, only three out of nine participants agree that the digital typefaces currently on the market are satisfactory and meet industry needs. Majeed states that although some Arabic digital typefaces are of poor quality, the majority are pleasing and suitable for advertising. He believes that “typefaces available on the Saudi market] are sufficient for advertisements. They minimize the demand for the calligrapher’s hand because there are many legible, satisfactory, and fantastic typefaces.”

Salem expresses his satisfaction with Arabic digital typefaces. He explains, “yes, they are good enough. They are precisely rendered… and they have advantages over hand-drawn calligraphy when it comes to printing technology and fast productions.” Adel sees a number of advantages to current typefaces. He explains, “nowadays, it is not necessary to be a calligrapher to open a sign-making shop. You can rely on the computer
fonts [digital Arabic typefaces], and you would not need to hire a calligrapher at all” (interview, December 2002).

Zaki explains that he “always” has to hand-draw the calligraphy for the signs and graphics his advertising company produces. He states that he has more than 400 typefaces on his computer, but he is satisfied with, and uses only fifteen of them. He explains that the rest “are similar and poor in quality.” Zaki also emphasizes the importance of freehand calligraphy. He points out that “the new generation and some of my clients demand freehand calligraphy because they got tired of computer typefaces and traditional calligraphy styles” (interview, December 2002).

Hameed complains that digital typefaces do not meet the advertising industry’s needs. He explains:

They [digital Arabic typefaces] are neither beautiful nor unique… what you have on your computer, someone else also may have… there is no creativity in computer fonts… It is important to have the calligrapher’s touch, particularly in advertising material such as outdoor signs. I always hand-draw all the calligraphic works [types] in all the signs I create. Most of my clients favor hand calligraphy over computer fonts (interview, December 2002).

Omar believes that digital typefaces have positively contributed to the advertising industry and have facilitated production. However, he states that he can not rely on digital typefaces alone and often uses freehand calligraphy as well. Emad stresses that Arabic digital typefaces available on the Saudi market are “not beautiful and/or sufficient for graphic and advertising industries.” He says that “sometimes when I select a typeface from the font list on my computer, I get strange pictures instead of letters.” Emad adds that he rarely uses digital typefaces; he “often” hand-draws the headings in “all” of the graphics and outdoor signs his company produces.
Badr shares his feelings about Arabic digital typefaces:

Digital typefaces available on the market are not good at all. They are not suitable for advertisement. I have more than 200 typefaces on my computer, but what I use without having to alter and fix are only three typefaces… the rest I have to spend so much time to fix. There is nothing new or unique about digital typefaces; everyone has the same fonts. So, how can your design be unique if you use pre-designed fonts? (interview, December 2002).

**Need for Improving Typefaces**

Seven out of nine participants believe that there is a need for improving Arabic digital typefaces. Majeed thinks that digital Kufi typefaces are satisfying and beautiful, but they fall so far below the beauty level of his favorite traditional Fatimi Kufi. He agrees that it would be very helpful if digital typefaces could be improved. Adel also recommends improving the quality and design of Arabic digital typefaces to increase the number of suitable typefaces on the Saudi market. Zaki explains that there is some improvement in digital Koki and Naskh styles, but the rest of the digitized traditional calligraphy styles, such as Diwani, Thuluth, and Riqa’, “are still very bad and ugly; I cannot use them” (interview, December 2002).

Four participants who recommend improving digital Arabic typefaces also comment on a popular font and layout software, Ka-lek. Majeed states that “there is a software called Ka-lek [similar to Moshafi, see p. 39-41]; it has nice traditional Thuluth and Farsi typefaces. It is the best software available these days, but you *must* be a professional calligrapher to utilize it.” Zaki, owner of a well-known calligraphy shop where he himself does the calligraphy work, laughs when he emphasizes that “Ka-kek is good, but you have to spend three days to compose just one line of text.” Adel notes
another drawback of Ka-lek software. He explains that the software costs about 1800 Riyal, ($480 U.S.D.) which he considers “very expensive, otherwise it is good. You can compose Thuluth and Naskh calligraphy just like the traditional styles.”

Badr discusses an important issue regarding the process of designing and creating Arabic digital typefaces. He analyzes a common disappointing practice:

Digital typefaces must be improved. The problem is that computer programmers think they can create typefaces on their own. Of course, when computer programmers design digital typefaces, the result would not be a pleasant. It is important that a programmer works with a calligrapher step by step in order to come up with an acceptable typeface (interview, December 2002).

Abdo strongly recommends that Arabic digital typefaces be “greatly improved.” However, he believes that “digital typefaces will never replace Arabic handwritten calligraphy.” He explains that digital fonts of Thuluth and Diwani styles are “all wrong…the curving quality and the beautiful ways of connecting letters and words can be achieved only by hands.”

Omar has a strong opinion on this issue:

I think that by improving digital typefaces and relying on them excessively would negatively impact the creativity in Arabic calligraphy. In other words, if digital typefaces are greatly improved and we become very satisfied with them, we might stop producing calligraphy where we connect words and letters in such ways that are impossible to achieve on the computer.

I always encourage people to use digital typefaces and to take advantage of them, but I still believe that each of us should continue to explore and invent new styles in calligraphy based on his/her views and skills. This way, every creative calligrapher and designer would have his/her own unique artistic style. Furthermore, I am afraid that if digital typefaces were improved and people became totally satisfied, then the creative calligrapher would lose his job and the tradition of Arabic calligraphy that has lasted for hundreds of years would be discontinued (interview, December 2002).
Salem is the only participant who is “fully satisfied” with Arabic digital typefaces. He notes that digital Arabic typefaces are sufficient and that there is no “urgent need” for improvement, but “enhancing Arabic fonts would be advantageous” (interview, December 2002).

**Recommendations for Improving Arabic Type Design**

Participants provide a number of suggestions for designing quality Arabic typefaces that represent Islamic and Arabic cultural identity. Five participants (Omar, Majeed, Zaki, Badr, and Emad) recommend that a typeface should be *legible* and *readable*. When a typeface has letterforms that are easy to distinguish from one another, then that typeface is legible.

For example, letterforms that are too similar in shape may reduce the legibility of a typeface. Readability refers to the amount of time needed to read a body of text. For instance, when a typeface can be read at fast speed, then it has a satisfying readability. Several different type designs and type treatments, such as strong contrast in the strokes or small x-height of letterforms, can reduce the readability of a typeface by increasing reading time.

Zaki, Badr, and Hameed agree with Omar in that type designers should “pay great attention to the *aesthetic appearance* of the typefaces.” When I ask Omar what he means by “aesthetic appearance,” he replies, “I do not know how to explain that. It is what your eyes would feel comfortable with.” Badr and Hameed use the word “beautification” instead. Badr says, “beautiful calligraphy is when you can see the movements of the strokes the Qasaba [wedge-tipped reed made from bamboo] makes, when there is balance
and harmony between letterforms, and when you can see the elegant transitions from thin
to thick in the strokes of the calligraphy.” In contrast, Omar suggests that type designers
“draw” letterforms and words using pencils instead of creating letterforms using
calligraphy pens (i.e., felt-tip markers and reeds). He believes that the “traditional
evidence of the slant of the pen” is no longer a necessity for modern calligraphy or digital
typefaces.

Another idea by Zaki is to “preserve the harmony, elegance, and definitiveness of
letterforms that exist in traditional calligraphy when you are designing a new typeface”
(interview, December 2002). Hameed has a similar belief as he explains that “letterforms
should be in harmony.” Majeed and Omar agree that “an intensive study” of the harmony
and elegance of traditional Arabic calligraphy styles is essential for designing new quality
digital typefaces that express the distinctive characteristics of Islamic and Arabic
cultures.

Omar encourages type designers to be free from traditional calligraphy rules. At
the same time, he emphasizes, and Abdo agrees with him, the importance of not imitating
Western typeface designs. Omar further elaborates that “this does not mean you do not
get some inspiration and design ideas from Western typefaces or from other cultures, or
using Islamic ornamentation” (interview, December 2002).

Omar suggests less involvement of Islamic ornamentation in digital typefaces. In
contrast, Emad suggests incorporating more Islamic ornamentation in new digital
typefaces to add some Arabic and Islamic essences to new digital typefaces.

Majeed, Zaki, Adel, and Emad all think that traditional calligraphy styles should
be the foundation for any new digital typeface or calligraphy style. Majeed and Emad
think that any new typeface should be “based on and generated from” traditional calligraphy styles. Majeed explains that “after choosing a traditional calligraphy style as a foundation for your new typeface, you should maintain the basic structure of that particular traditional style in your new typeface” (interview, December 2002). Emad has a similar view, as he recommends not incorporating or combining two or more traditional calligraphy styles when designing a new typeface. He explains that incorporating two or more traditional calligraphy styles “confuses people… it is important that one knows where your typeface comes from” (interview, December 2002).

Salem notes that any new Arabic calligraphy style and typeface must follow the traditional rules of calligraphy. He shares his view on designing new Arabic typefaces:

There is no modern or old typeface or calligraphy. However, there is Arabic [traditional] calligraphy that has specific rules which were established a long time ago, and we must follow these rules. Anything [typeface or calligraphy style] that does not follow these rules is not an Arabic calligraphy style or typeface, but we should name it by whoever designs it. These kinds of typefaces or calligraphy styles should be considered as experimental calligraphy designed for advertisements or graphic design applications (interview, December 2002).

**Modification of Traditional Calligraphy**

Since modifying Arabic calligraphy is a major aspect of this study, participants are asked to respond to two open-ended questions that have similar meanings. The first question asks for opinions on whether there is a need to modify traditional Arabic calligraphy styles in order to make them more suitable and compatible with today’s communication technology (e. g., advertising) and why. This question introduces the issue of change by using the word “modifying.”
The second question asks whether participants believe that traditional Arabic calligraphy styles should maintain their traditional forms despite the increasing demands for more modern looking typefaces in contemporary communications and advertising applications, and why. This question does not suggest an issue of change but introduces the concept of preservation and protection by using the word “maintain.” The second question motivates participants for a deeper and more informative discussion than the first question.

In response to the first question, eight out of nine participants (Hameed, Majeed, Abdo, Zaki, Badr, Salem, Adel, and Emad) agree that traditional calligraphy styles should not be modified or changed. Badr, Emad, and Zaki welcome modifications only in freehand calligraphy and Kufi.

In response to the second question, five participants (Abdo, Badr, Salem, Adel, and Emad) agree that traditional Arabic calligraphy styles should maintain their traditional forms and rules despite the increasing demands for more modern looking typefaces for today’s communications and advertising applications. Three participants (Zaki, Majeed, and Hameed) welcome minor modifications but only for advertisements, particularly large outdoor signs and neon signs. However, it should be noted that the three participants, in their responses to the first question, agree that there is no need for modifying traditional calligraphy styles in order to make them more suitable and compatible with today’s communication technologies, which include advertising. Omar’s responses to the two questions confirm that he believes that major modifications of traditional calligraphy styles in general, including commercial art, have become necessary at the present time.
Abdo states that “traditional calligraphy styles should not be changed and no one should introduce any modification no matter what his justifications are” (interview, December 2002). When I ask him why, he replies, “because these days, there is no one better than the calligraphers who invented them” (interview, December 2002). Salem agrees with Abdo but gives different rationales for rejecting any modification of traditional calligraphy styles. He believes, and Badr, Adel, and Emad all agree with him, that “traditional calligraphy styles are perfect and beautiful… and there is no need for modifying them” (interview, December 2002). When I specifically ask if there is a need for modification of traditional calligraphy styles for commercial art and advertisements, he replies, “no, they are good for advertising if they are properly used.” Badr and Adel agree with Salem that traditional calligraphy styles, without any modifications, are appropriate for commercial and advertising uses. Badr further explains:

There is a need for people who know how to use traditional styles correctly, but other than that, they [traditional calligraphy styles] are more beautiful than modern Freehand styles and computer fonts… there are few people who know how to use traditional styles in advertising… and that is the big problem (interview, December 2002).

Adel strongly recommends maintaining Arabic calligraphy rules. He mentions, “if you make the letters shorter than what they should be [in a certain calligraphic style], then you break an important calligraphy rule… and this is wrong.” He suggests not making any modifications in traditional calligraphy styles when creating advertising and outdoor signs, “otherwise, do not use them at all.”

However, Omar believes that traditional calligraphy styles can and should be modified for advertising and commercial art. He comments:
We have to forget about the rules of calligraphy and stop trying to obey them… saying a letter must be only this or that shape and in that specific measurement. We have to be free from these rules. The calligraphers who suggested these rules made great achievements in the history of Arabic calligraphy and I admire them… now, I reconstruct and redesign calligraphy and typefaces based on my own style for our time. There is nothing bad about breaking traditional calligraphy rules… they are not rules we must follow… Art is all about breaking rules.

I think that traditional calligraphy styles, in their traditional forms, should have been adapted for computer use or printing a long time ago, but when letterforms were modified and letters were vertically aligned on straight lines, they became easier and more suitable for printing and computer usage (interview, December 2002).

Majeed, Hameed, and Zaki agree to minor modifications in traditional calligraphy for outdoor signs and advertisements. Hameed believes that whenever traditional calligraphy styles are modified, they “oftentimes look ugly and bad…, but in advertising, it is necessary to carefully and slightly modify them.” When I ask him why, as he earlier stated that traditional calligraphy styles are “beautiful,” he replies, “to make them easier to read and more interesting” (interview, December 2002).

Majeed suggests some common minor modifications for traditional calligraphy in outdoor signs and advertisements and the rationales for modifications:

Traditional calligraphy is usually set in relatively small sizes and meant to be read at short distances. Traditional calligraphy is usually used in books and small calligraphy artworks that we hang on the walls, but Arabic calligraphy in outdoor signs is viewed and read from a long distance…, and sometimes you use lights [neon tubs] for your signs…, and your clients specify the dimensions of the sign. Therefore, you must compromise. In many cases, you need to increase the thickness of the strokes in your calligraphy when the size of the sign is large or when you use neon.

When I look at calligraphy or typefaces and handwriting type [calligraphy] in an outdoor sign, I do not look at how the rules of calligraphy were applied or the aesthetics of calligraphy in that sign. Instead, I look at the overall design and layout of the sign. I do not agree with the person who
Several participants discuss and comment on a particular neon sign, Alsandooq Alaswad (see Figure 28), by Saad Al-Zeyad as an example of modifying traditional calligraphy. The calligraphy of the sign is based on the traditional Thuluth style. The sign is about one hundred ten yards long and five yards high. Yellowish-pink neon tubes were used on a black background. The calligraphy was hand-drawn by Saad Al-Zeyad. The modification in the sign can be broken down into four noticeable changes: (a) shortening the height of vertical letters, (b) eliminating tashkelat (vowel and decorative marks), (c) expanding the width of the strokes, and (d) slightly modifying the proportions and shapes of the letters. Some participants (Majeed, Zaki, and Hameed) support these modifications while Abdo and Salem criticize them. Majeed supports the modifications and explains:

If we look at the sign Alsandooq Alaswad [black box], we can see that it is very beautiful even though some modifications have been introduced in the Thuluth style. Why? There is a need [when using traditional calligraphy styles in large outdoor signs] to increase the width of the strokes, even if this will result in changing the rules and measurements of the traditional Thuluth style, which is known for being elegant… because it has thin strokes.

Most calligraphers tend to use teshkelat to fill the awkward empty spaces above and under the letters. However, Saad did not do it this way; instead, he beautifully increased the widths of strokes and shortened the heights of the letters. Therefore, there are no awkward spaces anymore, and the letters are not too thin when you look at the sign from a distance…, and these changes eliminated the need for adding tashkelat, which may reduce the legibility. This approach is excellent… and I do not see any defects in the calligraphy in that sign… I support what he [Saad Al-Zeyad] did and is still doing (interview, December 2002).

Zaki believes the Alsandooq Alaswad sign is “very beautiful and correct and still has the characteristics of the traditional Thuluth style.” He considers the modifications
“minor changes.” When I ask him whether there is any awkward modification, he replies, “maybe it will be better if the letters are slightly longer… but I do not know… improving it is easier said than done… I cannot create calligraphy like the one in that sign” (interview, December 2002).

Hameed has a strong opinion about the calligraphy in the sign. He stated that “people who say Saad [in creating the calligraphy in the Alsandooq Alaswad sign] did not follow traditional Thuluth style, they do not know anything about calligraphy.” He further explained, “for instance, the letter Seen is a little bit different from the traditional one, but this modification did not negatively affect the beauty or legibility of the letter.” Hameed also emphasized the importance of keeping letters in harmony.

In contrast, Abdo sees the calligraphy in Alsandooq Alaswad as an unsatisfying work. He states:

I am not in favor of the calligraphy in the Alsandooq Alaswad sign. It is senseless and totally wrong to make letters longer or shorter than the standard size, no matter what. For instance, the letter Alf [the first letter in the Arabic alphabet] must be between five to seven dots [in Thuluth style]…and anything less or more is wrong. It is unacceptable not to follow the style’s rules. These rules were invented by great calligraphers;
nobody these days is close to their level of artistic ability (interview, December 2002).

Salem has a similar view and suggests following the calligraphy rules of traditional styles when creating calligraphy in signs or other advertising materials. When I ask him why, he explains, “If you modify their rules, they lose their beauty and meanings… everything has its measurements” (interview, December 2002). He criticizes the modified Thuluth presented in the Alsandoaq Alaswad sign as it does not correctly follow the calligraphy rules of Thuluth style. Salem recommends that calligraphers and designers “must not use the traditional Thuluth style in outdoor signs and advertisements in general unless the size of the sign is suitable for the measurements of the letterforms of Thuluth style” (interview, December 2002).

**Representation of Arabic Identity and Type Design**

**The Importance of Representing Arabic Identity in Calligraphy**

Four participants (Adel, Zaki, Badr, and Salem) believe representing Islamic identity in Arabic calligraphy and digital typefaces to be a “very important” consideration. Three participants (Hameed, Emad, and Majeed) state that it is “important.” Omar believes it is “somewhat important.” Abdo states that representing Islamic and Arabic identities in Arabic calligraphy is “not important.” He believes that the aesthetic appearance of typefaces is more important than representing Islamic and Arabic identities.

Omar explains, “we write in Arabic. Therefore, it is important that Arabic typefaces and calligraphy styles have Arabic and Islamic appearances. However, that does not mean that we use *only* the traditional and old calligraphy styles.” Majeed
believes it is important that modern Arabic calligraphy styles and digital typefaces look traditional. He shares these thoughts on this complex problem:

Creativity should not lead us to a loss of our Arabic and Islamic identity. The art of Arabic calligraphy has a very long history dating from the sixth century, or even before. So, we do not want, after more than 14 centuries, to lose this distinguished art and tradition and its history just because we are looking for creativity. It is important that we maintain this tradition [traditional Arabic calligraphy]. We must be proud of this form of art.

Some calligraphers and designers want to be creative and modern in their work, and sometimes this leads them to imitate Western artists and forget about their identities and tradition... giving up your tradition for creativity is an unacceptable sacrifice. I believe that the West depreciates us when they see us loosing our identity (interview, December 2002).

Badr stresses that representing Islamic and Arabic identities in calligraphy and typefaces is very important, particularly in advertising, because “everyone is constantly looking at calligraphy and typefaces in advertisement materials” (interview, December 2002). Adel points out an important aspect of the problem. He explains that foreign designers, in particular those from India and Pakistan, are not concerned with representing Islamic and Arabic identities in the works they do. He sees this issue as critical and “could contribute to losing our identity” (interview, December 2002).

Zaki believes it is important that Arabic calligraphy and typefaces remind Muslims and Arabs of their Islamic and Arabian culture. However, he considers beauty to be more important than representing Arabic and Islamic identity. When I ask him why it is more important, he replies, “Foreigners and other countries are not my concern. I make signs for Saudis and Arabians and this is my audience and target. Subsequently, it is important for me to make my work beautiful and attractive to my clients” (interview, December 2002).
Identity and Major Modifications of Traditional Calligraphy

In response to the question about the possibility of introducing major modifications to traditional calligraphy styles without negatively affecting their Islamic and Arabic appearances, eight out the nine participants agree with Badr that “it is impossible.” Zaki says, “I think if you start introducing changes to traditional calligraphy styles, gradually you will find yourself far from the original [traditional styles], then the traditional styles will just disappear with time” (interview, December 2002). Therefore, he recommends maintaining the calligraphy rules and visual appearances of traditional styles without any changes. Zaki believes there is “a risk of losing our identity” (interview, December 2002).

Only Omar believes it is possible to maintain the identity while introducing major modifications to the rules and visual appearances of traditional calligraphy styles. He explains how Western cultures recognize Arabic calligraphy and how certain visual components contribute to forming a visual identity:

People from other countries and cultures think Arabic calligraphy and typefaces are very decorative. That is true, but only in some traditional old styles such as Thuluth and Diwain. People in the West may not know that, these days, there are hundreds of less decorative typefaces and calligraphy styles … they might not even be aware of the fact that traditional calligraphy styles are being used less nowadays. This is because modern calligraphy and typefaces do not have very distinctive overall appearances yet.

Traditional calligraphy styles have very distinctive characteristics because they are usually ornamented, aesthetically attractive, and elegant; therefore, they are easily recognized and remembered, particularly for people from the West. Now, after these traditional calligraphy styles have been simplified, they became less distinctive. Therefore, they takes more time to be recognized and remembered (interview, December 2002).
Loss of Identity and Attempts of Modifying Typefaces

Participants were then presented with phrases composed in six digital typefaces (see Appendix E). These typefaces are arranged into three groups: A) traditional calligraphy styles, Moshafi and Kufi Fatimi, B) simplified/modified traditional styles, Farah and Najm, and C), non-traditional typefaces, Ahmed and Yahya. Participants, then, are asked to respond to the following two questions:

1) Which typefaces or groups (A, B, C) do you believe represent the identity of Islamic and Arabic culture best? Please explain how you reached your conclusion.

2) Which typeface/typefaces do you believe contain modifications that cause loss of Islamic and Arabic identity? Can you identify those changes? How would you re-design these typefaces to better represent Islamic and Arabic cultural identity, (what would you delete, alter, add, and keep)?

Purpose of asking these two questions was to collect data about:

• how participants evaluate and compare traditional typefaces, simplified traditional typefaces, and modern typefaces with respect to the representation of identity

• to understand what criteria participants use to visually identify a typeface or calligraphy style as representing Islamic and Arabic identities

• whether participants can identify visual codes that could contribute to making a typeface or calligraphy style that better represent Islamic and Arabic identities, and to identify those codes

Group A: Moshafi and Fatimi Kufi. All nine participants agree that group (A), Moshafi and Fatimi Kufi, are the best typefaces to represent the identity of Islamic and Arabic culture since they are similar to the traditional calligraphy styles. Participants agree with Omar as he explains:

Typefaces in group (A) [Moshafi and Fatimi Kufi] express the Islamic and Arabic identity better than the other typefaces in the group (B and C) because they maintain the characteristics of traditional Naskh style in Moshafi typeface and the traditional Kufi style in Fatimi Kufi designed by
Mamoun Sakkal. These traditional characteristics include a curvy line quality, extensive use of ornamentation, connecting words and letter together, and paying a great attention to how words or a sentence would look as a whole... in other words, making a body of text beautiful as a whole (interview, December 2002).

Five participants (Majeed, Abdo, Zaki, Hameed, and Badr) state that Moshafi and Fatimi Kufi typefaces are beautiful. It was noticeable that participants consider beauty as the standard by which they judged any typeface. Majeed explains, “Fatimi Kufi [designed by Manoun Sakkal] is beautiful and extraordinary and looks just like the traditional old Fatimi Kufi style.” Abdo claims that the letterforms of Moshafi and Fatimi Kufi typefaces are “perfect.” Overall, all participants are impressed with the typefaces of group A.

**Group B: Farah typeface.** Four participants (Omar, Majeed, Zaki, and Emad) out of the nine believe that the Farah typeface represents Islamic and Arabic identity. Omar and Majeed think that Farah represents Islamic and Arabic identity because it is based on the traditional Naskh style with some simplifications and modifications. Both Omar and Majeed agree that the typeface is legible and easy to read; consequently, Majeed suggests using Farah for advertising purposes.

In contrast, five participants (Abdo, Badr, Adel, Hameed, and Salem) out of the nine agree that Farah “does not represent Islamic and Arabic identity and is ugly.” These participants explain that the unpleasant appearance of the typeface is due to the lack of harmony and balance among the letters and words. Abdo claims that Farah typeface “has awkward stroke-width transitions... sometimes the stroke is thick, then it suddenly gets very thin; this is wrong.” Abdo believes the typeface can not be improved.
Zaki believes Farah is the “most ugly” typeface among the six typefaces and “needs much improvement.” Badr and Hameed argue that Farah is “a very ugly, unacceptable, and poor modified version of the traditional Naskh style” (interviews, December 2002). Adel, sees the Farah typeface as a modified combination of traditional Naskh and Riq’a. He suggests that the approach of combining calligraphy styles, Naskh and Riq’ah, is “totally wrong and the designer does not understand anything about calligraphy or typeface design” (interview, December 2002).

**Group B: Najm typeface.** Three participants (Omar, Majeed, and Adel) agree that the Najm typeface represents Islamic and Arabic identity because it is based on the traditional Kufi style with some minor modifications. However, six participants (Abdo, Badr, Emad, Zaki, Hameed, and Salem) do not believe Najm represents Islamic and Arabic identity, even though they still agree it is based on the traditional Kufi style.

Although Majeed and Omar consider Najm a beautiful typeface, three participants (Zaki, Badr, and Abdo) think the typeface is “unappealing.” Abdo explains, “I do not consider this [Najm typeface] as a typeface; it is just a worthless and foolish design” (interview, December 2002).

**Group C: Ahmed typeface.** While Omar and Majeed believe that the Ahmed is easy to read and does represent Islamic and Arabic identity, six participants (Abdo, Adel, Hameed, Badr, Salem, and Emad) agree that Ahmed typeface is “unappealing” and does not represent Islamic and Arabic identity.

Zaki has a different view from the other participants. Although he considers Ahmed a beautiful and well-designed typeface, it does not represent Islamic and Arabic identity. When I asked him why Ahmed does not represent Islamic and Arabic identity,
he replied “it does not look anything like traditional Arabic styles” (interview, December 2002). Badr considers Ahmed as unappealing typeface. He reveals two drawbacks of Ahmed: it “takes up so much space and is difficult to read” (interview, December 2002).

Majeed thinks that Ahmed is satisfactory. He explains that Ahmed is based on the traditional Kufi style and maintains the basic structure of letterforms of the traditional Kufi style. He states that the designer of Ahmed typeface is creative, as he skillfully makes letterforms to be easily recognizable and also have a modern look. Omar notices that the letterforms of Ahmed are “well-designed and in harmony with each other.”

While Hameed considers Ahmed typeface to be “unpleasant” and not able to represent Islamic and Arabic identity, he still recommends using Ahmed for advertising purposes since it is easy to read and has a modern look. Four participants (Abdo, Zaki, Salem, and Emad) agree that Ahmed has potential to be a satisfying and acceptable typeface if it is improved.

They suggest a number of possible modifications and minor adjustments for improvement. Abdo suggests making dots into perfect circles instead of squares, opening the right side of the letter Aeen and repositioning the letter Meem under the baseline instead of above it. Emad suggests replacing the square dots with diagonal shapes, making the head of the letter Woaw smaller and its tail gradually leaning to the left as it goes down. He also recommends filling the letter Aeen entirely, making the letter Meem smaller and more circular, having a left-slanted shape at the tops and ends of the letters (Alef and Lam), varying the thickness of the strokes, and adding some curving quality to the overall design of the typeface. Salem recommends a major modification to Ahmed as
he suggests having a traditional Thuluth or Naskh style as the foundation design for Ahmed.

Zaki disagrees and has a different viewpoint, as he does not recommend redesigning the Ahmed typeface. He explains, “if you make changes in the design of a typeface, the typeface loses its characteristics… it is better to design a new one instead” (interview, December 2002).

Group C: Yahya typeface. All nine participants identify two major problems with the Yahya typeface. First, the typeface does not represent Islamic and Arabic identity. Second, it is extremely difficult to read. Participants admit that they initially thought of Yahya as a Western (English) typeface. None of the nine participants were able to read Yahya except for Omar, and only with significant difficulty. Omar offers some possible causes for these two major “problems”:

It is because the typeface lacks any visual connection with traditional Arabic calligraphy and is not based on pre-existing common digital typefaces. Yahya is based on a common Western typeface… maybe Times typeface. This fact dissociated Yahya from Islamic or Arabic culture. The typeface is also difficult to read, which is another major problem. The illegibility of Yahya was caused by two factors. First, the letters are very similar to Western letterforms. Second, the letters are disconnected from each other (interview, December 2002).

Majeed agrees with Omar’s statement and adds:

I am opposed to this kind of typeface. The designer just took Western letterforms and forced them to fit into Arabic alphabets. This method of designing typefaces would take us away from our cultural identity and calligraphy tradition. Arabic calligraphy does not need Western type design, nor does the Western type need Arabic calligraphy (interview, December 2002).

Hameed believes Yahya is “unattractive and incorrect,” and that the designer “just wanted to be different.” Badr calls the typeface “foolish and can not be fixed or
improved.” Salem, Adel, and Abdo call the typeface “senseless and worthless.” Abdo
laughs as he asks, “is this the letter (fa)? If we say it is, then we are just fooling
ourselves” (interview, December 2002).

Use of Nontraditional Typefaces for Printing the Qur’an

To understand the participants’ attitudes and beliefs with respect to using
nontraditional typefaces for printing the Qur’an or phrases of the Qur’an in books and
other printed materials, participants respond to the following two questions:

1) How acceptable are the typefaces of groups (B) and (C) [simplified
traditional and nontraditional typefaces] for printing the Qur’an? If not, explain why.

2) Is it appropriate to use the Ahmed typeface (a nontraditional and
contemporary typeface) for Qur’anic verses or passages? If not, please explain why.

Eight out of the nine participants agree that all four typefaces in groups (B), Farah
and Najm, and (C), Ahmed and Yahya, are neither acceptable nor suitable for printing the
Qur’an. Only Omar believes that any typeface that is easy to read and visually pleasing,
such as Farah and Ahmed, would be suitable for printing the Qur’an. He argues that
Farah might be easier to read than the traditional Naskh style, the standard typeface for
printing the Qur’an. Omar explains that, nowadays, people are more exposed to
simplified traditional and modern typefaces in everyday activities such as reading books,
magazines, and newspapers, watching television, and using the Internet. Therefore, he
believes that the public has become more familiar with nontraditional typefaces than
traditional calligraphy styles. Omar predicted that “nontraditional typefaces will become
easier to read than traditional calligraphy styles for the younger generation… if not now,
then it will be for coming generations” (interview, December 2002).
Abdo thinks that only the traditional Naskh calligraphy style is appropriate to use for printing the Qur’an. He elaborates:

Aside from the visual aspects, the holy Qur’an should be regarded with great respect and honor. Therefore, only traditional Naskh should be used. It is the calligraphy style people are used to, and it is flexible, easy to read, and beautiful. None of these typefaces are suitable for the Qur’an. For example, if you use Ahmed or Farah, they take so much more space comparing to the traditional Naskh. Nothing is suitable for the Qur’an but traditional Naskh style; even other traditional calligraphy styles [i.e., Thuluth, Diwani, and Riq’a] are not suitable for the Qur’an (interview, December 2002).

Emad points out that Muslims are used to seeing and reading the Qur’an printed in traditional Nask. He believes that “old people will not be able to read nontraditional typefaces [Farah, Najm, Ahmed, and Yahey]” (interview, December 2002). He further explains that the Ahmed typeface is not suitable because it does not represent the Islamic and Arabic identity.

Emad agrees with Majeed, Zaki, Hameed, and Badr that only traditional Naskh is suitable to use for printing the Qur’an because it is easier and more beautiful than the other existing typefaces. Hameed and Badr do not recommend using Ahmed typeface for the Qur’an or the traditions of the Prophet Mohamed. Badr points out that Ahmed has two major drawbacks; it takes so much more space in comparison to the traditional Nask, and it is not easy to read. Salem gives another rational for using the traditional Naskh style: “The Qur’an was written in traditional Naskh and it should not be replaced with any other typeface, ever” (interview, December 2002).
Influence of Western Type Design

Recently creating new Arabic typefaces based on the designs of Western typefaces has been a common practice in Arab countries including Saudi Arabia. This practice has been of concern and has been discussed in a number of books and articles. Participants respond to the following two questions regarding the causes and effects of this practice:

1) Why do some Saudi calligraphers and designers tend to build their Arabic typefaces on the designs of Western typefaces?

2) Is there a risk of losing Islamic and Arabic identities as a result of that influence or practice? If so, to what extent is the risk?

Majeed analyzes how some Saudi and other Arabic designers were encouraged to base the design of the typefaces they create on Western type designs:

There are non-Arabian agencies which would like to see our Islamic and Arabic identity destroyed. They support designers who are willing to participate in designing Arabic typefaces that do not carry our identity and are based on a Western design. These designers and calligraphers think they are improving Arabic typefaces! This is just like what happened in Yahya where the design of the typeface is a totally Western design. This is a failure of Arabian designers and calligraphers (interview, December 2002).

Majeed believes designers and calligraphers, wanting to be more creative in their works, have another possible motivation for this practice. He comments:

Some designers want to be more creative and to have a more modern look and style for the typefaces they design. However, that does not mean that we go to the West for inspiration. If we do, then it is an unacceptable sacrifice of our arts and traditions. Our inspiration should come from Islamic and Arabic arts.

Now, the West is searching for our Islamic artworks and displaying them at their museums. In contrast, we [Muslims and Arabic] are forgotten about it … this is wrong. Love of creativity should not lead us to ignore our Arabic calligraphy and Islamic art. Any digital typeface must be based
on traditional Arabic calligraphy styles or the simplified versions of these traditional styles (interview, December 2002).

Abdo does not recommend designers take Western letterforms and modify them to create Arabic letterforms. He believes that incorporating Western designs with Arabic typefaces is “wrong.” He gives two reasons for this. The first is that Western letterforms look so different from Arabic letterforms. The second is that Western letterforms are disconnected, while the beauty of Arabic calligraphy relies on the fact that the letterforms are connected and the words are linked in a variety of ways. He believes that it is significantly important that Saudi type designers understand these two reasons or, as he calls it, “fundamental design concepts.” Abdo argues that the practice of creating Arabic digital typefaces based on the designs of Western typefaces is due to “the lack of essential calligraphy skills and creativity of some ungifted and unqualified type designers” (interview, December 2002).

Badr sees the practice of creating Arabic typefaces based on the design of Western typefaces as a design trend or movement that will become old-fashioned soon. He explains:

Nowadays, it is the fashion to create new digital Arabic typefaces based on the designs of Western typefaces, because designers want to come up with new and modern designs and break the common habit in order for people to not get bored with Arabic calligraphy and typefaces. I think there is a some risk, but not great risk, of losing our identity because it is a fashion right now and it will go away soon (interview, December 2002).

Adel believes that there is a risk of losing Arabic identity by basing new Arabic digital typefaces on Western typeface designs. He does not know the motivations or intentions of these designers. He agrees with Abdo and Emad that this practice is proof of the weak artistic ability of designers and calligraphers engaged in this practice. Emad
thinks that most Arabic digital typefaces that were designed on the basis of Western type design are “boring and ugly.”

Omar argues that Western digital typefaces are more diverse and well-designed when compared with Arabic digital typefaces. Therefore, he believes that some designers may find Western typefaces as “a source of inspiration” for new Arabic typefaces. He emphasizes that artists always borrow design ideas from different cultures (e.g., Western, Chinese, and Indian). Omar thinks that borrowing and modifying design ideas from Western typefaces are acceptable practices and should neither be a problem nor a “practice that demolishes our identity” (interview, December 2002).

Hameed says that the practice of creating Arabic typefaces based on Western designs has proven Arabic calligraphy is flexible. He supports Omar that Western typefaces could be seen as a “source of inspiration.” He gives a relative example of incorporating elements of other cultures into Arabic art:

It is just like when Arabic musicians incorporate Turkish and Indian melodies or rhythms in their music and you, as a listener, can hear these non-Arabian melodies, but you feel the music is definitely Arabian and we enjoy this kind of music. The important thing is that musicians should incorporate non-Arabian melodies in such way that does not overpower the Arabian music essence. I do not see anything bad about this (interview, December 2002).

Omar and Hameed claim there is no risk of losing Islamic and Arabic identity by creating Arabic typefaces based on the designs of Western typefaces as long as it is done thoughtfully by professional designers. Badr also does not see a risk of losing Arabic and Islamic identity due to this practice, since he considers it as a “temporary design trend or movement” (interview, December 2002). In contrast, seven participants (Majeed, Abdo,
Zaki, Salem, Adel, and Emad) express concern and believe there is a major risk of losing Islamic and Arabic cultural identity.

**Calligraphy Education in Saudi Arabia**

**Perceptions of Participants on Calligraphy Education**

The following question is asked to determine the overall perceptions of participants on calligraphy education in Saudi Arabia and whether they are satisfied with the present level of calligraphy education in public and private schools:

- Are you satisfied with the level of calligraphy education in Saudi Arabia? Please explain how do you come to your conclusion.

Eight of the nine participants state that they are not satisfied with the level of calligraphy education in the country. All participants agree that the public and the government do not consider calligraphy an important factor any more. Therefore, they do not appreciate it as they did in the past. Omar and Emad agree with Abdo, who states that “there is nothing I can call Arabic calligraphy education in this country. Calligraphers nowadays learn on their own, either from friends or from books” (interview, December 2002). Only Majeed says that he is somewhat satisfied with the level of teaching calligraphy in Saudi Arabia. However, he explains that it has not reached an “acceptable level.”

Only Majeed and Hameed recognize the Alkaateb Institute for Teaching Calligraphy as an educational institution for teaching calligraphy. However, they consider it an “unsuccessful institution” because, as Hameed states, “students do not really learn that much at Alkaateb… it is all about money” (interview, December 2002). Majeed believes that “Alkaateb helps students improve their handwriting rather than becoming
professional calligraphers. Therefore, I am not expecting Alkaateb to be helpful in improving calligraphy education in the country” (interview, December 2002).

Calligraphy education in public schools is poorly regarded. Adel notes an important issue and a “disappointing practice” regarding the teaching of calligraphy. He explains:

Calligraphy education in public schools seems as if it does not exist. It is because the calligraphy teacher is usually the science or reading teacher who does not have any calligraphy background. It is really rare to see an art teacher who teaches calligraphy. Therefore, in recent years, the general public views teaching calligraphy in schools as an unimportant issue. The art of painting is taking the public’s attention… even though calligraphy, not painting, is the historical Islamic and Arabic tradition and art (interview, December 2002).

Emad believes that, due to the existence and ease of using digital typefaces and publishing software, lay people as well as potential designers have become less interested in learning about calligraphy, and the public and government believe there is no need for traditional calligraphy any more.

**Calligraphy Education and the Saudi Industry’s Needs**

Since participants are professional calligraphers who have worked for long periods of time in the advertising profession, it is advantageous to ask whether they believe that the teaching of calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia meets the needs of the advertising industry. All nine participants agree that calligraphy and design education in the country does not furnish the advertising industry with qualified calligraphers and designers.

Omar argues that “teaching calligraphy in a traditional way [where students improve their calligraphy skills by copying the teachers’ calligraphy and other
calligraphy masterpieces using black reed on white paper] is not useful in today’s advertising profession” (interview, December 2002). He believes that the Saudi advertising industry does not need traditional calligraphers who are proficient only in traditional calligraphy. Omar thinks the Saudi advertising industry needs designers and calligraphers who are “creative and able to design, draw, and use computer and graphic software” (interview, December 2002).

Hameed admits, “I would not hire a traditional calligrapher. He would not be useful at all… the advertising industry in Saudi Arabia needs graphic designers, not traditional calligraphers” (interview, December 2002). He explains that teaching traditional calligraphy is not as useful as teaching graphic design. Hameed and Badr agree that the lack of qualified and creative Saudi calligraphers and designers is due to the fact that there are no design schools in the country.

Badr mentions another factor that may contribute to the problem of Saudi calligraphers not meeting the industry’s needs and expectations. He believes that the majority of Saudi calligraphers and designers lack fundamental and essential understandings of the art of advertising and graphic design. He emphasizes the importance of drawing and design skills and knowledge of color theories for calligraphers and designers to succeed in the advertising industry in Saudi Arabia today.

*Improving Calligraphy Education*

In response to the question, “How can the teaching of calligraphy in Saudi Arabia be improved?”, the participants offer various suggestions and recommendations for improvement.
Establishing schools for teaching calligraphy and design. There are no Fine Art schools nor are there Fine Art and calligraphy majors in universities and colleges in Saudi Arabia. However, there are Art Education majors at colleges of education at a few universities and colleges. The Art Education departments usually offers only one class on calligraphy and Islamic ornamentation. The main mission of Art Education in Saudi Arabia is to provide public schools with art teachers, not to create professional artists (i.e., painter, graphic designer, printmaker, and calligrapher).

The issue of establishing Fine Art schools was also discussed numerous times among Saudi artists and educators. However, the government rejected several proposals for establishing Fine Arts schools or Fine Arts majors within colleges and universities in the country. Participants respond to the following two questions regarding the establishment of Fine Arts schools and the functions of these schools:

- Is there a need for establishing Fine Arts schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia?
- What are your recommendations concerning functions, missions, and curriculums of schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design?

All nine participants agree that there is a significant need for establishing Fine Arts schools in Saudi Arabia. However, they focus their discussion on the establishment of schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design.

Conventional schools versus extracurricular activities. Seven participants (Majeed, Abdo, Zaki, Hameed, Badr, Salem, and Adel) agree that potential schools for teaching calligraphy and design should hold only one or two hours of evening classes daily so that students attending these classes do not necessarily have to be fulltime students. By holding evening classes, students can attend public schools or have jobs in
the daytime. Hameed suggests that classes at calligraphy and design schools should be viewed as extracurricular activities because “many people consider calligraphy as a hobby. They do not see it as profession where students go to school to study calligraphy and then have a job as calligraphers and designers” (interview, December 2002).

Omar, however, recommends establishing conventional schools and institutes for teaching calligraphy and design instead of holding evening classes or extracurricular activities. He argues that students should take “five to six years to graduate, not like the Alkaateb Institute where they go to improve their handwriting and then they think they became professional calligraphers” (interview, December 2002).

Emad suggests that calligraphy and design should be majors in universities. He believes that extracurricular activities for teaching calligraphy and graphic design would not be an effective strategy to supply the Saudi advertising industry with qualified designers and calligraphers.

**Public and private schools.** Four participants (Majeed, Hameed, Badr, and Salem) suggest that calligraphy schools should be established, funded, and administered by the government. Hameed points out that private organizations are unlikely to have the financial capability to establish and run large schools for teaching design and calligraphy. Salem suggests another rationale for establishing public schools instead of private schools. He claims that “most people [in Saudi Arabia] trust and have faith in public schools rather than private ones” (interview, December 2002).

Abdo and Zaki, however, suggest establishing private schools for teaching calligraphy and design. Both Zaki and Abdo agree that the government is not interested in establishing Fine Arts schools of any kind; therefore, it is unlikely that the government
will fund or support schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design. Omar does not see any major differences between public and private schools; therefore, he does not prefer one over the other for establishment of programs in calligraphy and design.

**Certification, letter of completion, and ijaza.** Six participants (Majeed, Zaki, Abdo, Salem, Omar, and Adel) emphasize the importance of granting students certification or diploma when they graduate. Zaki recommends that the potential calligraphy and design schools should grant students certification “just as it was before the government closed the classes at the Institutes of Calligraphy years ago, or otherwise grant students ijazas signed by their calligraphy teachers [see p. 67-68 for more information on ijaza ]” (interview, December 2002). Majeed agrees with Zaki and adds that students should be granted a certification or diploma when they graduate, “not just a letter of completion, as in the case of Alkaateb Institute” (interview, December 2002).

Badr, however, does not see certifications as an important matter. He explains:

> Nowadays, having a calligraphy certification is worthless. For example, I graduated from the Institute of Calligraphy years ago and received my certification, but I opened my calligraphy shop while I was a student, before I got my certification. It was, and I think it still is, not a mandatory document for applying for a license from the government for opening a calligraphy shop or advertising agency (interview, December 2002).

**Foci and curriculums.** All nine participants agree that teaching traditional calligraphy styles must be included in the curriculum. Majeed recommends teaching traditional calligraphy classes. He explains, “the schools should provide some calligraphy classes in a traditional way where students copy what their calligraphy teacher writes on the blackboard” (interview, December 2002).
Six participants (Omar, Majeed, Hameed, Abdo, Badr, and Adel) recommend classes on the history of traditional calligraphy. Hameed and Abdo agree with Majeed’s suggestion that classes be offered in all major eras of Arabic calligraphy, including pre-Islamic, early Islamic, Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman periods. He believes that “if students understand traditional art and realize how much effort and time were put into Arabic calligraphy and Islamic art, then they are more likely to appreciate it more” (interview, December 2002). Adel was the only participant to suggest classes on creating Islamic ornamentation.

Majeed suggests establishing schools that provide two majors. The first major would be traditional calligraphy where students study traditional calligraphy and become professional and skillful in traditional Arabic calligraphy styles. The second major would be “modern calligraphy”, where students learn more about Freehand calligraphy and graphic design. Students majoring in modern calligraphy, then, would work in commercial and advertising industries. Majeed strongly recommends these two majors to be in the same school, “so that students understand that calligraphy exists in two major forms” (interview, December 2002).

Abdo, however, does not recommend teaching freehand calligraphy at all. He explains:

How would you teach freehand calligraphy? It has no rules or principles to follow… What would you teach, then? Therefore, I believe it is impossible to teach… There is nothing that can be called teaching modern or freehand calligraphy… it is all depends on the taste and artistic ability of the calligrapher.

Therefore, I recommend teaching students only traditional calligraphy and, after they graduate, they can practice freehand calligraphy on their own. If the student is gifted, then he will be able to create beautiful freehand
calligraphy. If he is not gifted, then he can not do anything… he can not be an artist no matter what we teach him (interview, December 2002).

Participants suggest several art subjects be included in the curricula of potential schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia. Majeed, Omar, and Hameed believe classes on the use of art materials and tools are also helpful and should be offered. Four participants (Omar, Majeed, Badr, and Hameed) agree that providing classes on the use of computer and graphic software is one of the most important components of the curriculum. Three participants (Omar, Badr, and Adel) emphasize the importance of offering classes on drawing. Other suggested subjects to be included in the curricula of the potential schools include printmaking, (recommended by Majeed and Hameed), art appreciation, (suggested by Adel), and photography, (recommended by Omar).

Six participants (Zaki, Omar, Adel, Hameed, Badr, and Majeed) also emphasize the importance of providing intensive classes on graphic design. Omar recommends that the focus of the potential schools should be graphic design and not traditional calligraphy. He believes that the “schools should supply the Saudi industry with what it needs and demands: graphic designers, not traditional calligraphers” (interview, December 2002). Omar states:

I think that the dominant focus of these schools should be graphic design so that the students would have skills in calligraphy, drawing, and design. In doing so, we would have designers who understand all the aspects of design and also have all the necessary skills to create quality artworks, not just painters or traditional calligraphers (interview, December 2002).

When I ask Omar why it is important to have graphic design as the dominant focus in the curriculum of potential schools for teaching calligraphy and design, he responds:
Because graphic designers know how to draw, paint, use computer and graphic software, and have knowledge in color theories. This is the successful designer that we should be looking for these days. Some graphic designers are even proficient in photography and image-editing, which is an important component in the advertising industry (interview, December 2002).

**When to start.** Zaki and Badr concede that students should start taking classes in calligraphy and graphic design schools after they finish elementary school. Badr agrees that students will learn calligraphy faster if they start after elementary school than if they wait until they finish high school. Zaki gives the following reasons:

Students or potential calligraphers should start learning calligraphy as early as possible. They can enroll in calligraphy evening classes for an hour or two hours daily. Learning and practicing calligraphy is easier when they are young… some may suggest starting calligraphy after students finish high school; this is actually a disadvantage because their hands then would not be as flexible as when they were young (interview, December 2002).

Four participants (Omar, Majeed, Hameed, and Salem) recommend that students enroll in schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design after they finish junior high school. Majeed explains that after students finish junior high school, “they would have sufficient knowledge of the Arabic language and spelling skills, which are necessary foundations for calligraphers.” He argues that learning calligraphy when young [as pre-teenagers] is an advantage because “people, as they get older, would have more responsibilities; therefore, they would have less time for learning and practicing calligraphy” (interview, December 2002).

Adel and Emad recommend students enroll in evening classes at calligraphy and design schools after they finish high school. Three, participants (Omar, Adel, and Emad) recommend that students study calligraphy and graphic design at the university level and
graduate with Bachelor’s degrees in calligraphy and graphic design. Adel suggests establishing colleges for teaching calligraphy, Islamic Art, and painting. Omar emphasizes that there should also be opportunities for students who want to further their studies and obtain higher degrees in calligraphy and design, such as M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. He explains:

It is important that there is a continuousness in learning about calligraphy and design… and art in general. It will not be enough to have a two years’ college study of calligraphy. We should establish a Fine Arts education system, like other countries where there are two-year institutes, Fine Arts colleges, and universities and higher education opportunities. Then, we would have talented and qualified artists and designers (interview, December 2002).

**Suggested model for calligraphy schools.** Abdo kindly explains in great details how the potential calligraphy schools should function and be organized:

The school would be a three-year school, and there will be an optional one-year major for students who want to have a major in a particular calligraphy style. The school would provide daily evening classes for two hours. There would be two exams. The first exam, called the *qualifying exam,* is to determine whether an applicant has the necessary calligraphy and artistic skills to be enrolled in the school. In the *qualifying exam,* applicants would be asked to write a sentence in two or three calligraphy styles. If the student shows potential calligraphy skills, then he would take the second exam, the *placement exam.*

In the *placement exam,* the teacher would ask the student to write a pre-selected sentence in Naskh, Thuluth, and Riq’a styles using reed pens and black ink on white paper. After reviewing the student’s calligraphy work, he would be placed in either the first, second, or third level.

Students in the first year (first level) would learn the Riq’a calligraphy style, practicing creating letterforms without connecting them, then they would practice combining letters and sentences. In the second year (level), they would do the same but using Nask, Diwani, and Farsi calligraphy styles. In the third year (level), after they developed proficient calligraphy skills, they would focus on Thuluth style and on creating interlaced calligraphic compositions in Thuluth and other styles. The fourth year
(level) would be optional for those who want to major in and focus on one particular calligraphy style (interview, December 2002).

This model is a common model for teaching traditional calligraphy in Egypt, and it was the model chosen and adopted for the Institute of Calligraphy in Riyadh before it closed. This model was also suggested by four other participants who attended the institute in Riyadh (Salem, Majeed, Badr, and Hameed).

**Improving Calligraphy and Advertising Professions**

*Suggestions for Improvements*

Participants offer a number of suggestions and ideas for improving the calligraphy and advertising professions in Saudi Arabia. All participants agree that establishing schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design would improve the calligraphy and advertising professions by providing qualified and creative calligraphers and designers. Omar, Adel, and Emad also recommend establishing Fine Arts universities and colleges.

**Increased public exposure to calligraphy.** Seven participants (Majeed, Omar, Zaki, Hameed, Badr, Salem, and Emad) agree that organizing more calligraphy art exhibitions in the country would improve the calligraphy and advertising professions. They believe that professional as well as potential calligraphers would be encouraged to practice and learn more about calligraphy.

Participants offer several suggestions to expose the public to more calligraphy and Islamic arts. Participants believe that when the public knows more about calligraphy, they will be more likely to appreciate and expand their support for it. These suggestions include offering workshops in calligraphy, recommended by four participants (Omar, Badr, Salem, and Emad). Zaki believes that organizing television programs on
calligraphy and graphic design would also be an effective strategy to expose the public to the art of calligraphy and design.

**Increased publication on calligraphy.** Salem suggests publishing more articles on calligraphy and Islamic arts in newspapers and organizing lectures on calligraphy for the public. Badr thinks that by increasing the number of calligraphy books on the market and reducing their prices would encourage the general public to read more about calligraphy and Islamic arts.

**Arts organization for calligraphers.** Abdo suggests that the Saudi Arts Organization (Jameeyat Alfeenoon, a government organization whose mission is to support artists and promote art activities within the country) should find a place for professional and potential calligraphers to practice calligraphy and learn from each other. Abdo explains, “it is just like when the organization [Saudi Arts Organization] provided painters with a place to practice painting and a gallery to exhibit their artworks” (interview, December 2002).

Four participants (Omar, Hameed, Badr, and Salem) agree that there should be a way for calligraphers to learn from each other and from other artists like painters and graphic designers. Their suggestion is that artists organize and host informal meetings at their homes. However, this suggestion seems impractical and rather difficult to achieve.

**Governmental support for calligraphers.** Majeed and Abdo agree that the government should give financial support to professional calligraphers and graphic designers “who would like to turn their love of calligraphy into a profession by opening their own calligraphy shops or graphic design agencies” (interview, December 2002).
Participants also suggest a number of possibilities regarding government regulations with respect to calligraphy shops and sign makers. Abdo, Badr, and Salem recommend that *only certified calligraphers* should be eligible to apply for a license to open a calligraphy shop. In addition to this requirement, they agree that there should be a mandatory calligraphy exam conducted by the Ministry of Broadcasting for those applying for licenses to open calligraphy shops.

Four participants (Abdo, Hameed, Salem, and Adel) stress that the Ministry of Broadcasting should not allow individuals from India and Pakistan to work as calligraphers in sign-making shops in Saudi Arabia, unless they show evidence of sufficient knowledge of the Arabic language. Salem says, “there are some individuals from India and Pakistan, who do not read or write Arabic, working as calligraphers. Therefore, they actually *draw* the letters or words, not *write* them. Consequently, it is likely that they misspell” (interview, December 2002).

Zaki suggests that the government send authorized officers to calligraphy and sign-making shops to inspect commercial signs for misspellings and also to evaluate the visual presentation of the signs. Then, the officers would decide whether to allow the signs to be installed. Zaki believes that by doing so, calligraphers and sign makers would make sure that their signs are free of misspellings and are visually appealing.

As previously mentioned, Omar suggests that the Ministry of Broadcast classify calligraphy shops, sign makers, and advertising agencies based on their specialties and capabilities. He suggests an A, B, C, and D ranking system where an “A” rank (within its classification of specialty) is the highest or most capable company to carry out complex and major design work. Omar believes that implementing this ranking system would not
only encourage sign makers to do their best to advance to higher ranks in the system, but it also would inform the public about the capacity of sign makers and graphic design agencies so that they make better judgements.

Omar recommends stronger copyright laws in the country. This issue has been a major concern among artists (i.e., painters, calligraphers, designers, singers, and writers) in Arab countries. However, the copyright law is rarely discussed in publications such as newspapers and magazines in Saudi Arabia. Omar emphasizes that strong copyright law would protect artists and encourage them to be more creative and original in their artworks and ideas, which would then improve all art-related professions, including calligraphy and advertisement.

Regulating advertising costs. Salem, however, suggests a different strategy. He believes that sign makers should “agree on and follow a certain method to estimate the cost of making signs, so clients would find the cost of their orders or signs almost the same between sign makers and graphic design agencies” (interview, December 2002).

Characteristics of Today’s Calligrapher

Need for new expertise in calligraphy. Approaches and tools in advertising industries are morphing to accommodate constant changes in consumers’ needs, technology growth, and introduction of new products. Today, the Saudi advertising industry demands professional calligraphers with characteristics and expertise that are different from characteristics and expertise of calligraphers 15 years ago. For example, use of neon tubs and large print in outdoor applications and signs were not common 20 years ago, and use of computer and graphic software was almost never used. However, today the use of computers has rapidly increased during the last ten years.
Recognizing the importance of change in the kinds of expertise professional calligraphers should hold, participants were asked to identify characteristics of a calligrapher who is most likely to succeed in today’s advertising and graphic design professions in Saudi Arabia. The participants described several qualifications and skills needed for Saudi calligraphers today.

**Knowledge and skills needed by today’s calligrapher.** Seven participants (Abdo, Zaki, Omar, Hameed, Badr, Adel, and Emad) emphasize the significance of the ability to efficiently use computer and graphic software in producing advertisements and other commercial projects and artworks. Salem believes that a successful calligrapher must have a strong imagination, as well.

Omar states that having a wide knowledge in calligraphy and visual arts would be a great advantage for success in advertising and graphic design. Omar also recommends that today’s calligraphers have the ability to “draw letterforms using pencil and not a calligraphy pen, so that he would have more possibilities in creating numerous styles, including a modern appearance” (interview, December 2002). He also believes that a successful calligrapher should be creative and maintain the ability and skill to break the rules of traditional calligraphy to create unique calligraphy styles and new typefaces for today’s advertisements.

Seven participants (Majeed, Abdo, Zaki, Badr, Salem, Adel, and Emad) emphasize the importance of having a traditional calligraphy background. Abdo, Zaki, and Salem agree that a potential calligrapher should also have “artistic abilities and a sense of art” (interview, December 2002). Zaki believes that calligraphers should “love
the art of calligraphy in order to become accomplished calligraphers and succeed in the advertising profession” (interview, December 2002).

**Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to present initial findings for the study. Data were organized into three sections. The first section was devoted to data collected concerning the Alkaateb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy (AIIAC). The second section presented data about The Calligraphy Organization in the Saudi city of Alqateef. The third section examined data gathered from interviews with nine professional Saudi calligraphers and their responses to written questionnaires.

The objectives of AIIAC are to improve students’ handwriting, to teach the practical aspects of traditional calligraphy, and to improve students’ spelling skills. The institute offers basic and advanced courses for students. Calligraphy instructors at AIIAC teach calligraphy in a traditional manner in which the teacher writes some letterforms or words on the board and students practice copying them using calligraphy marker or reed bamboo pens on white paper. The teacher then corrects the students’ work. Participants believe the AIIAC does not provide the Saudi industry with qualified calligraphers.

The Calligraphy Organization in Alqateef is a nonprofit organization founded to promote the art of traditional calligraphy. The organization has held a number of exhibitions and workshops and has organized public lectures on traditional calligraphy. Members of the organization maintain the tradition of the art of calligraphy in Saudi Arabia and hold attitudes and beliefs similar to traditional calligraphers. Purpose of this organization is to inform the public about calligraphy rather than educate future calligraphers.
Interviews with the nine participants reveal that professional Saudi calligraphers are facing difficulties when working in advertising and graphic design professions. The majority of participants agree that digital Arabic typefaces do not meet the needs of Saudi advertising industry and therefore significant improvement is needed in this area. Eight of the nine participants conclude that traditional calligraphy styles should not be modified and emphasize the importance of representing Islamic and Arabic identities in Arabic calligraphy and typefaces. Some participants welcome minor modifications of traditional styles when they are used in large outdoor signs, such as increasing the width of the strokes and shortening the height of letters.

All participants express their dissatisfaction with calligraphy education in the country and suggest establishing schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design. The following chapter is a discussion of the initial findings in the study. Suggestions and recommendations for possible improvements are also provided.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze and comment on the initial findings presented in chapter four. For purposes of clarification, the overall organization and same or similar headings from the previous chapter will be used. Comments and statements from publications (i.e., books, journals, and the Internet) are incorporated to further expand the discussions and to support the arguments. Illustrations and images are also utilized when appropriate.

Alkaateb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy (AIIAC)

All nine participants believe that the AIIAC, the first and, currently, the only private educational institution in the country for teaching Arabic calligraphy, does not rise to an acceptable level for teaching calligraphy. In the following pages, I discuss challenges and obstacles facing the AIIAC and I also present suggestions for improvement.

Inefficient Promotions

Published information about Alkaateb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy (AIIAC) is limited to the institute’s printed brochures, fliers, and newspaper ads. The brochures and fliers are available only at the institute’s office. I was unable to find reports
or articles on AIIAC in printed publications or on the Internet. The interview with Mr. Saadeq, a calligraphy teacher at the AIIAC, reveals that the AIIAC relies mainly on the outdoor signage outside the institute and newspaper ads that AIIAC occasionally runs to attract students. Mr. Saadeq states that the AIIAC “is not doing enough in terms of advertising about the institute” (personal communication, November 2002).

Inefficient advertising practices of the AIIAC may contribute to the remarkably small number of students enrolled. Low enrollment creates significant financial difficulties for the AIIAC resulting in reduction of instructors and staff, art materials, teaching aids, and advertisements. This reduction is likely to have a negative impact on the quality of the learning and teaching.

According to Mr. Saadeq, the institute does not receive any financial assistance from the Saudi government or from private organizations. Lack of financial support for calligraphy education in Saudi Arabia was also mentioned by two participants, Zaki and Abdo. They agree it is unlikely that the government will fund or support schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design in the future. At least two reasons for governmental non-support for calligraphy education may be: (a) the government does not regard the teaching of calligraphy as significant, and (b) the Saudi government believes that financial assistance for the teaching of calligraphy would lead to establishment of more calligraphy schools which in turn, may open the door to establishment of Fine Art schools.

Lack of financial assistance from the private sector is another major obstacle for private schools teaching calligraphy. Only one participant, Hameed, recognizes this issue. He states: “private organizations are unlikely to have the financial capability to establish
and run large schools for teaching calligraphy” (personal communication, November 2002). The other eight participants either failed to recognize lack of assistance from the private sector as an important issue or simply suggested that the government should be the only founder and supporter of art and calligraphy schools in the country. As the government is currently not interested in establishing art schools, engaging the private sector and gaining their support is critical at the present time if calligraphy education and general art education are to be improved in Saudi Arabia.

Mission of AIIAC

The objectives of AIIAC, as its brochure indicates, are to improve students’ handwriting, provide traditional calligraphy training, and enhance students’ spelling skills. These objectives could be included in calligraphy classes in public schools. The AIIAC does little to educate students on the history and significance of Arabic calligraphy to Saudi society.

Recommendations: AIIAC

These indicators may be seen as evidence for the following: (a) the number of students at the AIIAC is relatively small, therefore, one instructor is sufficient, (b) AIIAC was not founded or designed to play a major role in establishing effective calligraphy education in the country, (c) AIIAC does not have the financial capacity to open more classes and hire additional instructors to teach other important aspects of calligraphy like history, and theoretical issues such as aesthetics.

Mr. Saadeq and six participants (Majeed, Adel, Omar, Abdo, Badr, and Hameed) identified history of calligraphy and aesthetics as significant components in the teaching of traditional Arabic calligraphy. For that reason, the AIIAC meets neither the
expectation of teachers teaching at AIIAC nor calligraphers working in advertising companies today. Therefore, it cannot play an effective role in calligraphy education in Saudi Arabia currently. However, with a reconfigured curriculum and expansion, AIIAC could play a major role in teaching calligraphy and type design in the country.

Three important objectives should be added to the mission of AIIAC to improve its educational function and expand its role in industry. The first objective consists of supplying the Saudi advertising and graphic design industry with qualified calligraphers to meet current needs. The second objective would be to produce talented type designers to play a significant role in the digital typeface design profession. The third objective consists of promoting the art of type design and calligraphy by holding art exhibitions and public lectures.

**Arabic Calligraphy Organization in Alqateef City (ACOAC)**

Organizations and associations in visual arts are effective tools for promoting arts, supporting artists, and engaging and assisting potential artists. However, these organizations and associations are rarely founded in Arab nations. Currently, there is only one calligraphy organization in Saudi Arabia. The Arabic Calligraphy Organization (ACOAC) was established in November 15th, 2000, in Alqateef, a city in northwestern Saudi Arabia. The organization has played a positive role in promoting the art of traditional Arabic calligraphy within Alqateef. It has organized a few calligraphy art exhibitions in Alqateef, provided traditional calligraphy workshops, and organized public lectures on the art of calligraphy. One of the main objectives of the ACOAC is to preserve the tradition of traditional calligraphy. The organization has successfully
achieved this goal and its members are greatly committed to its mission as they practice calligraphy and produce artworks in the traditional fashion.

Other objectives of the ACOAC are as follows: (a) to provide a place for professional and potential calligraphers to meet, (b) to hold calligraphy exhibitions, (c) to provide workshops and courses for students to learn about calligraphy, and (d) to organize lectures on traditional Arabic calligraphy. These objectives are thoughtful and significant; however, expanding these objectives to include modern and freehand calligraphy could be beneficial since freehand and modern calligraphy are popular in advertising and graphic design industries at the present time.

The ACOAC should also expand its efforts in the area of publication. Currently the ACOAC has not invested in this important area. Since the organization depends solely upon governmental support, it is financially unable to publish monthly or quarterly journals although some members of the ACOAC are fully capable of writing articles on traditional calligraphy as they have a strong background in, and knowledge of the field.

More calligraphy organizations and associations in major cities and small towns throughout the country promoting calligraphy and Islamic art should be established. These calligraphy associations should not be limited, as they are currently, to governmental support and should not be required to seek the government approval for their establishment. The associations and organizations should also seek financial support from the private sector which might be more interested in providing financial assistance than the government.
Introduction

Most participants preferred not to have their interviews tape-recorded. They also asked to look at the interview questions prior to deciding whether they would participate in this study. All participants agreed to record the interviews after they examined the questions. They also greatly appreciated having second meetings (where follow-up questionnaires were used) to verify their statements given in the initial interviews and to provide further information or comments (see Chapter Three). Participants were flexible and very generous in providing their time for interview meetings.

Participants demonstrated a deep understanding of the artistic aspects of traditional calligraphy. In general, their suggestions and comments were thoughtful and practical. However, their comments appeared to contain some exaggerations and biased judgements. They also seem to base their artistic evaluations on personal preferences.

Participants also lack strong knowledge of fundamental concepts in graphic design, such as the elements and principles of design and color theory. Absence of such knowledge likely results from lack of formal education or coursework in any form of art other than traditional calligraphy.

For example, on several occasions during the interviews, participants displayed ineffective communication skills when attempting to explain of various art and design concepts. Omar states that designers should “pay great attention to the aesthetic appearance of the typefaces.” When I asked him what he meant by “aesthetic appearance,” he replied, “I do not know how to explain that. It is what appeal pleasing to my eyes and I feel comfortable with” (interview, December 2002).
Interviews with participants also revealed they possess very limited backgrounds in other forms of art, including merchandising signage, display graphics, lighting, printing, and interior design. Backgrounds in these art forms can be beneficial to professionals working in sign-making and retail graphics industry.

Difficulties and Problems Facing Saudi Calligraphers

Communication Difficulties

Discussing art and design aspects with clients. Seven of the nine participants (Omar, Badr, Abdo, Hameed, Emad, Zaki, and Adel) express difficulties discussing design and aesthetic issues with their clients. Participants believe the main cause of these difficulties is lack of art and design background on the part of clients and the general public in Saudi Arabia. Zaki explains, “it is all due to the ignorance people have with art” (interview, December 2002).

A number of participants assume this communication obstacle exists only in Saudi Arabia. Zaki believes “if I am a designer working in Europe, I would be dealing with and talking to clients and people who are educated in art and have strong art backgrounds… they are the people who would understand me” (interview, December 2002). Zaki’s statement is an exaggeration. Similar communication difficulties between artists and their clients exists in Europe and is a global concern in the advertising and commercial art profession. However, communication difficulties between artists and clients are likely to be greater in Saudi Arabia due to the public’s weak art background.

Participants suggest several solutions to this communication problem within Saudi Arabia. They recommended organizing calligraphy exhibitions, offering public calligraphy workshops, organizing public lectures, publishing articles on calligraphy in
newspapers, developing art and design television programs, and reducing the price of calligraphy books. These solutions target increased public exposure to the art of calligraphy. However, eight participants agree that a more “effective” solution to the communication difficulties between calligraphers and their clients is to establish art and calligraphy institutes in the country. Suggestions of all participants are important and in the right direction as they aim to increase the public’s awareness, background, understanding and appreciation of art and design.

All participants had strong background knowledge in practical aspects of calligraphy. However, it was surprising that they did not possess solid knowledge in the history of Arabic calligraphy. Only Majeed showed a very deep understanding and knowledge of the historical and aesthetic aspects of traditional calligraphy. Furthermore, all participants except Omar exhibited little knowledge and understanding of graphic design, advertising, and marketing. Interviews indicate they have no clear understanding of principals of art and design and have outdated approaches to advertising and marketing.

Participants also did not demonstrate strong knowledge and comprehension of general art and design vocabulary. Some participants used the phrases “looks good,” “harmonized,” and “tension” to express the concept of balance. They also use the word “ugly” to refer to concepts of awkward compositions or cluttered arrangements. Some participants also used the word “conflicting” for the concept of “contrasting” or “transition.” For instance, when Abdo says, “Farah typeface has bad conflicting stroke-widths,” he meant to say that the typeface has awkward stroke-width transitions or the typeface has unpleasant strong contrast in the stroke-widths. Participants’ lack of art
terminology and ability to explain art and design concepts during the interviews did not correlate with their educational backgrounds.

**Convincing clients to accept new design ideas.** Only three participants (Zaki, Omar, and Hameed) express difficulties in obtaining approval from clients when they present unfamiliar or new design concepts. They believe that the clients’ “poor” art background creates this difficulty. Omar explains that “the big problem is that some clients do not appreciate new approaches in design and calligraphy” (Interview, December 2002). To overcome this obstacle, participants suggest exposing the public to more calligraphy and design - the same solution given for communication difficulties when discussing art and design aspects with clients.

Clients who prefer Omar or Zaki for their projects appear to represent companies with shared characteristics. For instance, these companies are large and are more concerned about the outcome of their advertisements than smaller companies. Also, large companies with big budgets for advertising are more likely to seek innovative solutions than smaller companies who are interested primarily in name recognition. Therefore, large companies may be more willing to discuss design issues with calligraphers and designers. Large companies also demand and expect higher quality calligraphy and design works from Omar and Zaki because they charge more than other advertising companies. The respect reputation and creativity of these calligraphers may provide the basis for greater communication between designers and clients.

**Negotiating the cost of artworks.** Five participants agree with Omar, who states that “convincing clients with price has become difficult these days” (interview, December 2002). These participants reveal their clients repeatedly negotiate reduction in the cost of
orders. Participants identify several possible causes for clients’ negotiating tactics. First, there are many “unqualified foreign designers and calligraphers producing low quality, less expensive artworks” (Hameed, interview, December 2002). Differences in cost between unqualified foreign designers and the work of these six participants lead clients to assume that the six participants overprice the work they do. Second, clients may be unable to distinguish between good and bad work because they are not educated about differences in the quality of materials, creative designs, and calligraphy ideas.

Another major factor may be involved in negotiating prices. The number of design companies has rapidly increased in the last decade. Clients in recent years have more choices of graphic design agencies and calligraphers, and competition between these agencies has become greater.

As a way to convince clients that prices are fair, participants recommend clarifying the hours of work involved in creating exceptional designs as well as indicating cost of high-quality materials used. Participants believe that if clients understand the complexity and effort involved in the creative process they will be better able to understand the cost. Even though this solution has merit and seems logical and convincing, it may be somewhat irrelevant to this particular problem, as designers are always expected to give full explanations of their designs and projects to their clients. Omar and Zaki state that their clients, after giving them extensive explanations about the designs and projects, still think that prices are high (interview, December 2002).

Another potential solution for this problem is that the government prevent unqualified and/or foreign calligraphers who do not speak the Arabic language to work in established graphic design agencies or sign shops in the country. Again, this solution
seems unsatisfactory. Whether a graphic design agency employs Saudi or unqualified foreign calligrapher does not have a major effect on the cost of a project.

I find Omar’s solution to the most likely to succeed if implemented. He suggest that the Ministry of Broadcast rank advertising agencies. An “A” rank (within its specialty or category classification) denoting the most capable company to carry out large and complex projects. The “B” rank could denote less capable companies, and “C” are for the least capable agencies within a particular category. A ranking system, such as this, would assist clients in determining an advertising agency’s qualification and expertise for particular projects. The ranking system would also encourage advertising agencies to move to higher levels within the system by improving their capabilities. Consequently, competition between advertising agencies would be stronger, resulting in overall enhancement of the advertising industry in Saudi Arabia.

**Obtaining the clients’ confidence and trust.** Four participants claim that most of their clients, during their first visit, usually have little confidence in the calligraphers’ ability to produce artwork for advertisements, especially when it comes to creating logos and other elements requiring graphic design ability. Clients are aware that calligraphers lack background in graphic design because it is not taught in calligraphy schools in Saudi Arabia. However, creating logos and other graphic design elements are major components in advertising industry.

Interviews with the nine professional calligraphers working in the advertising industry in Saudi Arabia indicate they are very aware that they have difficulties creating logos. Nevertheless, most companies go to sign makers (calligraphers) for logo design because individuals who have formal education in graphic design are extremely rare and
charge significantly higher prices. One possible solution would require sign-making
shops and advertising agencies to employ graphic designers with expertise and
background in graphic design to do the graphic works needed. However, this solution
would require sign-makers to take coursework in graphic design which is unavailable at
the present time.

Interviewing and visiting participants at their companies revealed that advertising
agencies only show clients photographs of previous completed work. Creation of
brochures displaying both the finished work and the process and steps involved in
creation of such projects would expedite communication between clients and design
companies. These brochures would also explain how the cost of calligraphy, design, and
the production of projects is estimated. Such brochures would give confidence to, and
assist clients in deciding upon which advertising agency is best suited to their needs.

Zaki, Adel, and Abdo believe that the most effective approach obtaining trust and
certainty in calligraphers’ abilities is to do some calligraphy in front of clients. This
solution may sound good but is impractical because the calligrapher may be required to
perform a calligraphic demonstration every time a client visits him, wasting valuable
time. Presenting a brochure or sample of previous calligraphy work together with
documentation of processes involved would produce equally convincing results.

**Creative Difficulties**

**Obtaining quality materials and supplies.** Only one participant, Adel, expressed
difficulties in obtaining quality art materials and supplies. He believes that there are many
types of materials and supplies in the market, creating confusion about which are good
materials and which are not. When I asked Adel to provide an answer to this problem, he
replied: “I do not know, maybe I will just go with what most people [calligraphers and designers] use” (interview, December 2002).

Searching for quality materials is essential in any industry and the advertising profession is no exception. Therefore, when searching for quality materials, one should exert effort and time, even be willing to travel to other cities or countries to obtain supplies needed. Obtaining quality art materials does not seem problematic in Saudi Arabia today. Moreover, Adel’s suggestion that he should go with what most calligraphers use may show his lack of interest in putting forth effort in searching for quality art materials. The dilemma he faces is an expected outcome of his lack of effort.

**Drawing and graphic design skills.** During interviews, seven participants repeatedly stated that they faced difficulties in producing logos and other art/design works that contain drawing and graphics. They agree that this problem is due to calligraphers’ lack of background in drawing and design. Participants agree with Abdo that “logos and graphics need creative graphic designers, not calligraphers. We [calligraphers] do not know how to create logos except in Tughra style [see figure 26 on p. 71]” (interview, December 2002). Tughra is one of the most flexible traditional calligraphy styles, as the heights and sizes of letterforms are not limited to certain measurements. Logos (logotypes) created in Tughra are often done with a calligraphy pen and involve no elements other than letters. Therefore, drawing expertise is not required.

Participants acknowledge that most calligraphers have insufficient drawing and design skills to produce graphics and drawings usually needed for logos, signs, and other advertising materials. Badr explains that this problem can be traced to two difficulties. First of all, most (if not all) calligraphers were taught in traditional calligraphy schools
where drawing and design were not included in the curricula. Second, there are no schools for teaching graphic design in Saudi Arabia.

Most participants agree that an effective solution to this problem would be to establish fine art schools where students can be exposed to all visual arts including graphic design, calligraphy, drawing, and painting. This solution would not only solve the obstacle facing calligraphers in designing logo and other graphic design work, but it would also improve the advertising and graphic design professions as well.

Further, calligraphers should purchase and practice using digital and printed clipart and readily available images on the market. Reading books on graphic design and drawing would also be beneficial to calligraphers working in the advertising industry. However, it should be stated here that such books are rare in Saudi Arabia.

*Creating freehand calligraphy styles.* All nine participants emphasize the importance freehand calligraphy has had in advertising and commercial art. Demand for Freehand calligraphy has dramatically increased in Arab nations since the 1980’s. Freehand calligraphy is widely used and is favored over traditional calligraphy styles in advertising, fashion, sport magazine layouts, and package designs. However, creating freehand calligraphy styles is not an easy task. It requires not only knowledge and skills of Arabic calligraphy, but also strong creativity and imagination. Throughout the last two decades, a large number of accomplished traditional calligraphers have failed to create a successful freehand calligraphy styles because they were educated in traditional calligraphy schools. In general, students at traditional calligraphy schools are encouraged to *precisely copy* calligraphic masterpieces or their teachers’ calligraphy. They are not allowed to create their own calligraphic styles or modify traditional styles.
Since use of freehand calligraphy is a significant factor in the Saudi advertising industry today, it disappointing to find that not many books have been published on this important subject. It is also disappointing that potential graphic designers and students at calligraphy schools in Arab nations are very seldom taught or exposed to freehand calligraphy. Saudi calligraphers interested in learning about Freehand calligraphy face major difficulties since books on the subject are extremely rare and freehand calligraphy is not taught anywhere in the country.

The participant Majeed explains the struggle of Saudi calligraphers in learning and creating freehand calligraphy:

There is a major shift, these days, to freehand calligraphy… but, why are Saudi calligraphers and designers unable to create satisfying freehand calligraphy styles? The answer is that there is no single school or even individual who teaches freehand calligraphy; there are no reference books on freehand calligraphy. I even think it is not taught in calligraphy institutes and schools anywhere in Arab countries (interview, December 2002).

Participants recognize Saad Al-Zeyad, a self-taught calligrapher, as the leader of freehand calligraphy in Saudi Arabia. Hameed explains the influences of Mr. Al-Zeyad on a large number of calligraphers in Saudi Arabia:

Freehand was introduced in Saudi Arabia by one person, Saad [Al-Zeyad]… Now, all calligraphers imitate his styles in calligraphy… we all [Saudi calligraphers and sign makers] try to imitate and copy Saad Al-Zeyad’s freehand calligraphy styles. The best of us is the one who gets close to Al-Zeyad’s style (interview, December 2002).

A personal communication with Saad Al-Zeyad reveals that he did not have any formal education in calligraphy and never had private lessons from traditional calligraphers. He began his interest in freehand calligraphy while working as a calligrapher for a sign shop at a very young age. He also explained that the positive
feedback from his clients has encouraged him to further explore Freehand calligraphy. These factors freed him from being strictly limited to following the rules of traditional calligraphy, thus forming self-confidence to “bend” or break some of the traditional rules and also develop his own styles. Saad Al-Zeyad believes that because he did not attend a “traditional Egyptian-style calligraphy school”, he is more creative in his artworks (personal communication, November 2002). Understandably, he is strongly critical of traditional schooling for calligraphers.

**Clients’ over-involvement.** Two participants expressed discomfort when their clients become over-involved in the design process. Evidently these clients think their input will improve the design. Emad believes clients underestimate calligraphers’ artistic skills and abilities. Neither of the two participants offers a solution to this problem.

Over-involvement of clients in the design process exists in many nations and cultures and this difficulty would be easily resolved by appropriate communications with clients. I also think that over-involvement of clients in the design process may be seen as a sign of clients’ lack of understanding particular designs or their dissatisfactions with the calligraphers’ performance.

**Misspellings in outdoor signs.** Four participants stated misspellings exist in many outdoor signs in Saudi Arabia. This problem is a matter of concern. Participants agree that cause of misspellings in outdoor signs is due to the fact that some Indians (from India) and Pakistanis (who do not have knowledge of Arabic language) work as calligraphers and designers in the country. This is likely to be the case. Luckily, the number of signs that have misspellings in them is relatively small.
Participants offer several suggestions to resolve this issue. The first recommendation is that the government should not allow individuals who do not read and write Arabic to hold a job, such as that of calligrapher, where knowledge of the Arabic language is required. Implementing this regulation would be a significant and effective contribution in solving this issue. Currently, Saudi government does not apply any restrictions or requirements on foreign calligraphers and designers.

Creative calligraphy works. Four participants (Omar, Hameed, Badr, and Majeed) admit that it is somewhat difficult for them to “continuously produce creative calligraphic works” for advertising applications. Clients’ demand for more and more creative designs and calligraphic work has put major creative pressure on calligraphers and designers.

Majeed and Abdo agree with Hameed that the difficulty creating new calligraphy styles exists because “all the creative calligraphers have died. Therefore, no more new quality calligraphy styles exist.” Majeed asks: “Why hasn’t anyone created a new calligraphy style other than what we have known since the sixteenth century or so?” He also wonders why creativity has started to disappear. His answer to the questions was that the lack of patience and the fast pace of today’s life have made calligraphers unable to create new calligraphy styles that are “more beautiful” than the traditional styles.

It seems difficult to believe that “all the creative calligraphers have died”. Thousands of new Arabic typefaces have been designed. However, only a small number of them are in high quality and well-composed. Hameed and the majority of participants consider digital typefaces as simplified/modified versions of traditional styles or variations of simple freehand calligraphy.
The term “calligraphy style” is used by most participants to refer to any style that can be performed using calligraphy pen following certain instructions or rules of calligraphy. Digital typefaces do not fit this definition. Most calligraphers, including all participants, do not regard digital typefaces as calligraphy styles. Rather digital typefaces are considered less significant and minor design achievements when compared with the practice of traditional calligraphy and freehand styles.

There is also a wide belief in Arab countries that any calligraphy style not fitting traditional classifications or not following the rules of Arabic calligraphy (even if performed with a calligraphy pen) are classified as “freehand”. Therefore, any new calligraphy style is considered a version of freehand rather than a new style in its own right. This belief may be erroneous.

For instance, there are some freehand styles that follow specific calligraphy rules and can be preformed using a calligraphy pen. One example is a freehand style created in early 90s by Saad Al-Zeyad (see figure 29). This style should be view as a calligraphy style in its own right since it follows the rules of Arabic calligraphy and is preformed using a calligraphy pen. However, Al-Zeyad’s 1990 style is somewhat difficult to accomplish as it required performing a great number of curvy lines which are created by constantly twisting the pen, paying great attention to the thick/thin stroke transitions, and varying the shapes and placements of letterforms based on the preceding and following letters.
None of participants offers a solution or recommendation for overcoming the difficulties of continuously producing creative calligraphic styles for advertising. Establishing schools devoted solely to teaching calligraphy and graphic design would assist in solving this problem and provide an avenue for creative individuals.

**Use of computers and design software.** Three participants state that they encounter difficulty when using computer and graphic applications. The most common problems identified by participants may be due to insufficient computer memory or insufficient memory allocated to graphic applications. Most popular graphic software requires a powerful computer. Most participants use relatively old IBM-compatible computers with less than a 500 MB of total memory.

Badr believes that some design and image-editing software are rather difficult to learn because one has to know some English to efficiently take advantage of application capabilities. Many popular graphic software programs are available in Arabic, including: CorelDraw and Adobe PhotoShop. EasySign, is only available in English but is accompanied by an Arabic user manual. Therefore, knowledge of the English language does not appear to be critically necessary or problematic. In fact, Hameed and Omar state
that even though they have very little knowledge of English, they have been using the EasySign drawing software for more than a decade and believe that they currently have a full control of its capabilities. Two participants believe that learning how to use computers and new graphic software was/is no problem at all.

**Financial Difficulties**

Two participants emphasize that some professional calligraphers face financial difficulties and are unable to establish calligraphy shops. This is true in any profession however it is greater in the calligraphy profession because only one person is responsible for financing the calligraphy shop. None of the participants have co-owners or any financial support from the government or private organizations.

As a possible solution for the financial difficulties facing Saudi calligraphers, two participants suggest that government and non-governmental organizations financially assist calligraphers by offering loans, free equipment and supplies. This suggestion seems rather unrealistic and difficult to achieve, as the government is unlikely to financially support small private businesses in any profession, and private sectors do not see any substantial benefit in supporting calligraphers who open or improve their shops.

A more effective solution may be for calligraphers to form corporation where they share responsibilities and profits. Further, calligraphers do not have to own a calligraphy shop. They can simply become employees, not directly involved in financial affairs.

Currently however, it is unusual for a Saudi calligrapher to work as calligrapher or designer for a private company. For instance, none of the participants have ever hired a Saudi calligrapher at their advertising agencies. Zaki explains the reason for not hiring a Saudi calligrapher at his advertising agency and calligraphy shop this way:
The major problem with hiring Saudi designers and calligraphers is that they work at your company for, let us say, six months, and after he learned everything about how to run the business, he would just open a calligraphy shop next to you…. This is a problem. Another thing is that he will not work if there is a soccer game or if he is invited to a party with his friends. Usually, his friends would ask him, “Why do you not open your own shop since you know everything by now?” He would reply, “I do not have enough money”. His friends would offer him a loan or collaborate to open a shop, or he may be advised to apply for a loan from a bank. Therefore, I am, as many are, not interested in hiring Saudi calligraphers and designers (interview, December 2002).

Salem laughs when he says, “If you hire a Saudi designer, he will be your competition in no time.” Even though this might be true in many cases, Saudi calligraphers and designers should not be rejected because they may one day provide competition for a former employer. A designer or calligrapher should have the right to open his own business at his own convenience, and it should not be viewed as inappropriate behavior as long as he notifies his manager in advance. In any case, if designers and calligraphers are fully satisfied with their income at an advertising company, they may not be interested in opening their own shop. Owners of design companies may benefit from reevaluating calligraphers’ salary.

**Administrative Difficulties**

Only one participant stated that he encounters administrative problems in the areas of marketing, sales, accounting, management, and production. These obstacles do not appear to exist in other participants’ businesses because they are relatively small when compared with his advertising agency. However, it is likely that similar advertising companies may face these same difficulties as they expand.

Cause of administrative difficulties seems to be that individuals responsible for marketing sales, accounting, management, and production are foreigners who lack
adequate background knowledge in their area of specialty. It is not uncommon in Saudi Arabia to see employees working in professions totally different from their background and experience. Moreover, some workers have not finished high school and do not have training in any field but still work in departments of management and accounting at large companies in the country.

The participant suggests solving this problem by establishing some institutes such as junior colleges that offer classes in business administration and marketing. I believe his suggestion is valuable but it will take decades to establish these educational institutions of this kind.

It is recommended that a more urgent solution is needed. For example, Saudi government could and perhaps should consider requiring all foreigners to submit a certification or degree in their areas of specialty along with their application for working VISAS. Such regulations exist in other areas of industry throughout the country but not in the advertising industry. Implementing this requirement would greatly improve the advertising industry throughout the country as all foreigners would be certified and per-qualified for the types of jobs to which they may apply.

**Employee Difficulties**

Two participants encountered some barriers when searching for qualified and well-trained technicians and electrical neon exports. In Saudi Arabia, these experts are usually from Philippine, Egypt, India, or Syria. Such experts are desired not only in Saudi Arabia but also in their home countries. Therefore, searching for skilled electrical neon technicians is not an easy task.
None of the participants offer any advice for making the search easier. While there may be no easy or fast solution for this problem, one could ask: if there is a high demand for electrical neon technicians in the Saudi advertising industry, then why are there no Saudi electrical neon technicians? Participants believe that Saudis do not like to work as electrical neon experts because it is a very technical and dangerous job and the pay is low. While the job may be a very technical and dangerous, the income of an electrical neon expert is equal to or more than that of other electrical experts. Therefore, it would seem Saudis would be as willing (if they have the needed knowledge and skills) to work with neon as they are with other electricity based professions.

Another difficult search or “major problem,” as Badr and Omar call it, is the search for creative calligraphers and graphic designers. It is true, as participants are aware, creative designers are very rare individuals in Saudi Arabia as well as in other Arab countries. Further, creative designers and calligraphers demand very high salaries.

Therefore, most advertising companies, such as those owned by Omar and Badr, employ unqualified calligraphers and designers. Omar states that “the lack of successful and creative designers in Saudi Arabia and other Arabian countries gives me no option but to hire designers whom I do not consider to be qualified and creative” (interview, December 2002).

My personal experience supports a concern about the lack of creative calligraphers and graphic designers in Saudi Arabia. While I was working at an advertising agency in Riyadh, the owner of the agency, on several occasions, asked me to search for creative graphic designers and calligraphers. I ran numerous newspaper ads but responses were very few. After meeting with the few applicants and reviewing their
portfolios, less than five percent (5%) were creative and qualified. The most qualified applicant was a Lebanese designer who graduated from a well-known university in Lebanon with a BA in graphic design. Surprisingly, he asked for five times the normal salary for foreign graphic designer. The designer was not hired because the agency could not afford to pay what he asked. The advertising agency did not hire any designers at that point because other applicants were not qualified.

Establishing schools of graphic design would contribute greatly to a solution for this problem. Offering more classes in graphic design in Art Education departments at universities and colleges will be helpful too. The current situation in Saudi Arabia, where there are no schools for teaching graphic design, requires potential graphic designers to seek graphic design education in other countries, particularly Arab countries. Arab countries are recommended because learning and having skills in Arabic calligraphy and typography is essential for any graphic designer interested in working in an Arab speaking country.

Religious and Cultural Issues

It surprising that only two participants expressed concern about governmental and religious restrictions limiting their creativity in graphic design and advertising artworks, particularly restrictions related to incorporating human figures into graphics. These restrictions pose the most critical problem and create the greatest challenge for graphic designers and sign makers. This issue is complex and beyond the scope of this study.
Despite restrictions, designers are able to successfully create simplified or abstract drawings of human figures. The difficulty in creating such drawings relies upon the designer’s graphic design ability, strong drawing skills, and imagination. Most calligraphers and graphic designers lack these qualities (as participants indicated earlier in this study). Currently however, it seems the only effective way to incorporate restricted graphics (i.e., human figures, animals, and musical instruments) is to create simplified or abstract versions of these disallowed figures and objects. Figure 30 shows a simplified drawing of a body builder athlete that is acceptable to the public and to the authorized religious organizations in Saudi Arabia.

Figure 30: an acceptable simplified drawing of a body builder designed by Sultan Zeyad.
One example was given by Omar who told an experience where a graphic was interpreted as a Christian cross, symbolizing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. He recounted how officers from Alhiyaah, a governmental religious organization, are inquired about his design of a restaurant sign. The decorative motif Omar used in the sign is definitely a familiar Islamic motif (see Figure 31); however, he was asked to remove it from the sign. In Figure 32, the similarity between common Islamic motifs and the decorative design used by Omar is clear and unquestionable.

Figure 31: An outdoor sign designed by Omar where a motif was misinterpreted by governmental religious organization as Christian cross, symbolizing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.
Figure 32: The questionable motif created by Omar (left) and common Islamic motifs (right).

On another occasion, Omar was unable to successfully create the drawing of a violin (see Figure 33). He was again asked to remove or cut a part of the drawing. This created a major problem for Omar and also for the owner of the music shop. A more acceptable abstract drawing of a violin might have been an abstraction similar to the drawing in Figure 33 on the right.

Figure 33: Unacceptable drawing of a violin by Omar (left), and a modified version by Sultan Zeyad that is more likely to be acceptable by governmental religious organizations (right).
Abdo also had an unpleasant experience when the designer at his advertising agency failed to create an acceptable drawing of a female for a beauty salon sign. He states that he was reprimanded and asked to sign a document stating that he would not create such designs in the future. However, a large number of acceptable drawings suggesting to a female figure for beauty salon signs have been created at Al-Zeyad advertising company (see Figure 34).

Figure 34: Acceptable drawings suggesting a female figure for beauty salon signs created by Al-Zeyad advertising company

Abdo and Omar do not offer any suggestions to overcome such difficulties. They try their best to follow governmental and religious restrictions. Both designers express
their desire for elimination of these restrictions. Unfortunately, eliminating governmental and religious restrictions would be extremely difficult at the present time.

A more practical solution would entail providing designers and calligraphers with necessary skills to create imaginative and acceptable graphics under present restrictions. The unpleasant experiences of calligraphers and designers who attempt to create acceptable graphics for advertisements in Saudi Arabia but fail to do so illustrate the urgent need for establishment of schools for drawing and graphic design in the country.

**Arabic Digital Typefaces**

*Typefaces and the Saudi Graphic Design Industry*

Seven participants state that Arabic digital typefaces do not meet Saudi advertising and graphic design needs. Three participants disagree. It is important to note that participants in disagreement are personally involved in designing signs and advertising materials at the present time. One of the three participants, for example, is a traditional calligrapher working as the head of a Cultural Affairs Department (CAD) in a governmental agency. His responsibility is to create calligraphic works for CAD publications. He does not design advertising materials such as posters, logos, outdoor signs, and display graphics for the public. Rather, his calligraphic works for the CAD are created in the traditional manner using a calligraphy pen on white paper. These works are then sent to a press-shop for printing.

The other two participants in disagreement stated that digital Arabic typefaces do meet the graphic design industry are from the first generation of calligraphers to graduate from the Institute of Calligraphy in Riyadh in the mid-1970’s. They stopped practicing calligraphy and designing signs more than a decade ago. They also have never used
digital typefaces or computers for their work. Therefore, the three participants who disagree with the majority of participants, may have been less exposed to digital typefaces than the other seven participants who use digital typefaces on a daily basis to design signs and other advertising materials. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that judgment of these three participants concerning satisfactory nature of currently available Arabic digital typefaces may be incorrect. These statements are also in contradiction with majority of the participants and critics.

The majority vie is summarized by AbiFarès (September 2001), Associate Professor of visual communication at the American University in Dubai, United Arabic Emirates. She points out that “most Arabic fonts available on the market often fail to have a unique visual or functional character” (On-line). AbiFarès also states that type designers “seem to be hopelessly copying existing traditional calligraphic styles” (September 2001, on-line).

One participant mentions that digital Arabic typefaces do not meet the needs of industry. However in his answer to another interview question, he states that “nowadays, it is not necessary to be a calligrapher to open a sign-making shop. You can rely on the computer fonts [digital Arabic typefaces], and you would not need to hire a calligrapher at all” (Adel, interview, December 2002). Adel’s latter statement about opening a sign-making shop without a need for a calligrapher or designer may reflect his true belive, but creation of signage without a calligrapher is unlikely to succeed, since more than ninety percent of the calligraphic works created require hand-drawing and are not pre-designed digitally.
Emad believes that digital Arabic typefaces are “poorly designed,” because when he selects a typeface from the font list on his computer, he “gets strange pictures instead of letters” (interview, December 2002). Apparently Emad is not aware that clip art and symbol designs are available in victor-line, true type, and postscript format and are listed within the font list for easy and fast accessibility for designers. Therefore, what he has on his computer is clip art (or image fonts as some critics prefer to call them) not as he believes, “poorly designed Arabic digital typefaces” (interview, December 2002). Since Emad ones not understand the function of clip art, he “often hand-draws the headings in all of the graphics and outdoor signs” his company produces which seems impractical and inconvenient.

The majority of participants agree digital Arabic typefaces are “similar and in poor quality.” Therefore, they use only a few (no more than 20 typefaces) of the hundreds or thousands of typefaces available on their computers. For example, one participant is satisfied with, and uses only fifteen out of more than 400 typefaces available on his computer. Another participant has more than 200 typefaces on his computer but he is able to use only three typefaces without alteration.

Hameed explains that digital Arabic typefaces are “neither beautiful nor unique… what you have on your computer someone else also may have” (interview, December 2002). Another participant says that “there is nothing new or unique about digital typefaces; everyone has the same fonts. So, how can your design be unique if you use pre-designed fonts?” (interview, December 2002).

Bases upon statements of participants quoted here and those of other participants in the study, it is generally accepted that digital Arabic typefaces available on the Saudi
market do not seem sufficient for graphic and advertising industries and appear less beautiful when compared with traditional calligraphy styles. However, the ability to create unique logos, corporate identities, and typefaces for signs is critical in the advertising and graphic design professions. Calligraphers and graphic designers without ability in this area could take advantage of the existing digital typefaces by altering and modifying letterforms to achieve unique designs. This method would also alleviate participants’ concern about consistently creating attractive freehand calligraphy styles, which only a few gifted individuals in the country are capable of producing.

Modifying existing digital typefaces is common in Western cultures and has proven to be a remarkably effective and practical technique to create logos and unique type designs. Currently, however, only distinguished Arab graphic designers who were exposed to Western art and graphic designs use this method. The intention of participants and calligraphers who do attempt to modify letterforms of existing digital Arabic typefaces is usually to make letters more beautiful and appealing instead of making them unique. This practice not only limits the usefulness and application of digital typefaces but depreciates the function of digital typefaces and their role in the advertising industry.

Figure 35 illustrates possible modifications of existing Arabic and Western digital typefaces to achieve unique corporate identity and logo designs. Such modifications require a strong background in graphic design and typography, and less of a background in calligraphy. Unfortunately, participants lack strong backgrounds in graphic design, again illustrating the importance of establishing schools for teaching graphic design in Saudi Arabia.
Figure 35: Achieving a unique logotype by modifying letterforms from existing Arabic and Western digital typefaces.

Need for Improving Digital Typefaces

Seven out of nine participants believe that there is a need for improving Arabic digital typefaces. They agree that the Arabic digital typefaces available on the Saudi market are “not beautiful nor sufficient for graphic and advertising industries.” It is a wide belief and concern among calligraphers and graphic designers in Arab nations that digital typefaces seem less sophisticated and appealing when compared with traditional calligraphy styles. While this widespread belief and support for improving digital Arabic typefaces may be valid, it might also be argued that the repeated comparisons between calligraphy (handwritten) and digital typefaces is fruitless and unproductive for the development of Arabic type design.

Participants during the interviews constantly stress the importance of making digital Arabic typefaces no less beautiful than traditional calligraphy styles. Several
books and articles also support this view. However, evaluation of a typeface should not be based on how beautiful it is, but rather on how it meets its intended design objectives and how significant those design objectives are. As AbiFarès points out, “most Arabic fonts available on the market often fail to have a unique visual or functional character that best accommodates specific types of design applications” (2002, on line). For example, when designing a typeface to be used for continuous texts (i.e., extended amount of text used in newspapers and books), the highest priority should be given to legibility and space reduction, not beatification. Failing to address these important issues create disappointing results.

Another critical issue involved in designing digital Arabic typefaces is the overwhelming argument of participants who agree with Zaki that the digital forms of traditional calligraphy styles, such as Diwani, Thuluth, and Riq’a, “are still very bad and ugly” (interview, December 2002). Again, most traditional calligraphers and Arab type designers continuously emphasize the necessity of developing beautiful digital forms of traditional calligraphy styles. Hassan Massoudy, a well-known Iraqi calligrapher living in Paris, explains:

Other [traditional] styles, like "Diwani" and Jeli Diwani, for example, are impossible to reproduce, except by the hand of the calligrapher. The difficulty lies in the fact that the letters in these styles do not have a common base. In fact, the Arabic alphabet consist of 28 letters, but carries actually many more characters because every letter changes according to its position in the word. The Diwani and Jeli Diwani styles, for example, is even more complex because the shape of a letter also depends on the letters that follow or proceed it. This explains why, with these styles, digital reproduction is impossible (June 2003, online).
The great attempt by Diwan Software Limited in 2000 to develop a digital form of the traditional Naskh style resulted in creating Mishafi, the most complex Naskh style typeface ever developed. Even though Mishafi typeface is an impressive typeface and truly retains both the beautiful shapes of letterforms and calligraphic rules of the traditional Naskh style, it has significant disadvantages. First, in order to compose an elegant text using Mishafi, strong knowledge of Arabic calligraphy and Naskh style is required. Such requirements are likely to create problems for graphic designers and publishers who usually have no background in calligraphy. Second, Mishafi can only be used with Al-Nashir Al-Sahafi or Al-Nashir Al-Maktabi, Diwan's publishing application, limiting the designer’s choice of layout software. Third, Mishafi provides great flexibility for users while composing text by providing a number of shapes for each letters to select the appropriate form based on following or preceding letters. Nevertheless typesetting using Mishafi is an extremely time-consuming task. Finally, as of April, 2002, Al-Nashir Al-Sahafi (Dibaj) with Mishafi and Diwan fonts costs $1,595 for Macintosh and $995 for Windows. Mishafi is considered expensive when compared with other Arabic typefaces, which range between $20 and $80 U.S. D..

It should be recognized that Mishafi was not intended to be used as an everyday communications or word processing software. It was designed specifically for setting Qur'anic and selective texts. Therefore, we should not expect this typeface to be the best choice for books, newspapers, and advertisements. However, Diwan Software Limited’s creation of Mishafi demonstrates the great challenges one would face creating a digital form of a traditional calligraphy style. Because Mishafi is the first digital typeface to reflect the beauty and tradition of handwritten Arabic calligraphy and because it serves as
a guide to production of future digital typefaces reflecting beauty and tradition, it can be said that the development of Mishafi is one of the major achievements in Arabic type design today.

While Mishafi is advantageous for printing the Qur'an and selective texts but has a very limited usage in advertising and publication industries, it is important to ask, what the most efficient methods and effective directions for designing Arabic typefaces for general use in advertisements, printed publications, and online publications today?

Four participants who recommend improving digital Arabic typefaces also commented on a popular layout software, Ka-lek. This software is specifically developed to handle the complexity of three digital typefaces representing the traditional calligraphy styles (i.e., Thuluth, Naskh, and Farsi). One participant stated “Ka-lek is the best font software available these days, but you must be a professional calligrapher to utilize it” (Majeed, interview, December 2002). Another participant, Zaki, laughs when he said “Ka-lek is not bad, but you may have to spend days to compose just one line of text” (interview, December 2002). Adel points out the high cost of Ka-lek: $480 U.S.D. All these disadvantages are identical to those mentioned regarding Mishafi typeface created by Al-Nashir Al-Sahafi.

Only Badr comments on a common though disappointing practice: computer programmers with no background in calligraphy who create poorly designed digital Arabic typefaces. He explains that “programmers think they can create typefaces on their own. Of course, when computer programmers design digital typefaces, the results would not be pleasant” (interview, December 2002). This issue has been discussed in a number of articles and books on Arabic type design. Badr’s suggests computer programmers...
work step-by-step with calligraphers in creating typefaces to improve the quality of
digital Arabic typefaces and the type design profession in Saudi Arabia and other Arab
countries.

Omar presents a unique opinion regarding the improvement of digital Arabic
typefaces. Even though he recommends using digital typefaces in advertisements, he
believes that “if digital typefaces are greatly improved and we become very satisfied with
them, we might reach a point where we feel that we do not need calligraphy, our elegant
and historical Islamic form of art” (interview, December 2002). This outcome is
improbable, since the history of type design and art in general have taught us that artists
and designers, including type designers, are always searching for new styles and
approaches to express the unique perspectives of their times. For example, thousands of
Latin typefaces have been already developed; nonetheless, more new typefaces are being
created every day. Therefore, the possibility of reaching a point where type designers
would feel completely satisfied with existing typefaces and have no design to create new
typefaces seems unrealistic.

Omar is very concerned that a “creative calligrapher would lose his job and the
tradition of Arabic calligraphy that has lasted for hundreds of years would be
discontinued” as a result of developing high quality digital typefaces (interview,
December 2002). This concern is shared by many calligraphers throughout the Arab
countries. However, decline of the need for the hand of traditional calligraphers may have
already started decades ago. An example of declining need for the calligrapher’s hand
may be found in the history of Latin and Asian type design and calligraphy.
For example, in Asia, traditional Chinese calligraphy still exists as a fine art form and is not severely affected by the development of print technology and digital type. Furthermore, while Chinese calligraphers and artists continue to practice and enjoy the art of traditional calligraphy, new generations of type designers and typographers are creating digital typefaces for print and computer screens. Some Chinese artists and scholars use the expression “experimental calligraphy” to describe the new painting movement that makes use of calligraphy.

Another example may be found in the West. Since the invention of movable type by Johannes Gutenberg in the 1440s, traditional Western calligraphy designers have accommodated continued development of the printing press. Therefore, the history of calligraphy, type design, experimental calligraphy in China, and the al-Horofiah art movement in Arab nations (see Chapter two for more information), does not support the concern of Omar and other calligraphers that the art of Arabic calligraphy would be demolished as a result of the advancement of digital typefaces.

**Recommendations for Improving Arabic Type Design**

Participants provided a number of suggestions for improving the designs of Arabic typefaces that preserve Islamic and Arabic cultural identity. Five participants state that all typefaces should be legible and readable. It may seem designing legible Arabic typefaces is an easy task since the Arabic alphabet consists of only 18 letter shapes for 28 Arabic letters. However achieving legibility is a great challenge and critical issue for type designers in Arab world for the following reasons.

First, the nature of Arabic writing requires connecting letters to form words. But not all letterforms can be connected within a word. For instance, some letters such as
Daal, Ra, and Wao can be connected only to the letter preceding them and not to the letters following. AbiFarès explains:

Unlike the Latin standard set of letters that determines the visual appearance of the font design (i.e., Hamburgevios), Arabic has no such set and all the basic shapes need to be drawn not only as freestanding forms but also in their variant shapes and as ligatures (September 2002, online).

Therefore, the Arabic writing system has four letterform or shape variations (i.e., initial, medial, final and freestanding) which cause a numerous letterform variations and ligatures.

Second, some letterforms share the same basic shapes. For example, the letters Jeem, Kha, and Ha all have the exact basic shape (see figure 36). When a dot is above the letterform, it creates the letter Kha, when it is in the middle of the letterform then it is read as the letter Jeem, and with the absence of the dot, then the letterform is Ha. Therefore the placements of dots when designing an Arabic typeface are very critical. The sizes and shapes of dots are also critical for readability of a letters. Several Arabic typefaces designed to be used for books and magazines have distinctive and well-designed letterforms; however, the inappropriate design and presentation of dots reduces the readability of the typefaces making it unsuitable for body text.

Another critical issue is the design of the shapes of the vocalization marks which also appear above or under letterforms. However, I believe vocalization marks may not be as critical as dots, since vocalization marks appear only in the Qur’an and other words that might be misread if the vocalization marks are not used.
Third, “in Arabic more importance is given to the shape of whole words than to that of individual letters. The reason behind this is Arabic’s [language] strong ties with the handwritten calligraphic script” (AbiFarès, 2001, p. 160).” Therefore, a type designer must pay great attention to how letterforms appear when connected to make words and lines of text since some adjustments and modifications may be needed. These important adjustments are usually overlooked by nonprofessional Arabic type designers.

Four participants suggest that type designers should pay great attention to the “aesthetic appearance” of the typefaces. I found the term “aesthetic appearance” to be vague, so I asked participants for more explanation. Omar replied “I do not know how to explain that. It [aesthetic appearance] is what pleasing to the eye” (interview, December 2002). Badr gives better clarification when he explains that “beautiful calligraphy is when you can see the movements of the strokes the Qasaba makes [wedge-tipped reed made from bamboo], when there is balance and harmony between letterforms, and when...”
you can see the elegant transitions from thin to thick in the strokes of the calligraphy” (interview, December 2002).

The shape and movements of calligraphy pen strokes and thin/thick transitions are more important in calligraphy than in digital typefaces. Therefore, any digital Arabic typeface designed for body text should: 1) have simple easy to recognize letterforms, 2) form visually well-balanced words when letters are connected, and 3) take less space than display typefaces.

Omar suggests that typefaces should be mechanically drawn using pencils. This approach is opposite Badr’s suggestion stated earlier. Omar contends: “traditional evidence of the slant of the pen is no longer a necessity for modern calligraphy or digital typefaces” (interview, December 2002). Omar also encourages type designers to free themselves from traditional calligraphy rules. Several other type designers support this approach as an effective method for designing Arabic typefaces that are more practical and compatible with computer and printing technologies of our time and more beneficial for advertising industry.

Another suggestion from Omar is not to imitate Western typeface designs but rather consider them as a source of inspiration. AbiFarès (2001) supports this approach. She states: “Latin type design can become an inspirational source in terms of ideas and possible directions that can easily be applied to Arabic type if it were to ever cross the threshold of the third millennium with regenerated vigour and confidence” (p. 163).

Omar also encourages type designers not to overuse Islamic ornamentation in digital typefaces. In contrast, Emad suggests incorporating more Islamic ornamentation in new digital typefaces to incorporate Arabic and Islamic essence. Emad’s
recommendation may be valuable in situations when representing Islamic identity is
important, but may not be appropriate in certain usage such as titles and display
applications.

Four participants agree that traditional calligraphy styles should be the foundation
for any new digital typeface or calligraphy style. Majeed explains that “after choosing a
traditional calligraphy style as a basic for your new typeface, you should maintain the
basic structure of that particular typeface and build on it.” Salem adds that any new
Arabic calligraphy style or typeface “must follow the rules of traditional Arabic
calligraphy” (interview, December 2002). These participants agree that traditional Arabic
calligraphy styles should be regarded as a great source of inspiration but not laws of
designs for creating new Arabic typefaces.

Emad does not recommend incorporating or combining two or more traditional
calligraphy styles to create a new typeface design. He explains that incorporating two or
more traditional calligraphy styles “confuses people… it is important that one knows
where your typeface comes from” (interview, December 2002). However, combining
design ideas from different typeface styles is a very common in the West and has proven
to be a valuable and effective practice for creating new styles. This method of combing
different styles and ideas is adopted not only by type designers, but from artists in all
visual and performing art disciplines (painters, interior designers, architects, musicians,
and dancers).

Modification of Traditional Calligraphy

In the process of forming questions on modifying Arabic calligraphy, I was aware
of the impacts of certain words. On one hand, I predicted that the use of the word
“modifying” would suggest the issue of change; on the other hand, the word “maintain” would introduce the concept of preservation and protection. Therefore, to better understand the participants’ perspectives, I designed the following two questions with similar meanings. The second question motivates participants for a deeper and more informative discussion than the first question. Participants seemed more engaged in responding to the second question because it suggests maintaining and protecting not only traditional styles but also the tradition of Arabic calligraphy as well. The two questions are as follows:

1) *Is there a need to modify the traditional Arabic calligraphy styles in order to make them more suitable and compatible with today’s communication technologies and advertising industry? Why?*

2) *Should traditional Arabic calligraphy styles maintain their traditional forms despite the increasing demands for more-modern looking typefaces for contemporary communications and advertising applications? Why?*

My prediction about the impact of word choices is supported, as each participant responded to these two questions somewhat differently.

In response to the first question, eight out of nine participants agree that traditional calligraphy styles should not be modified or changed. However, in response to the second question, five participants agree that traditional Arabic calligraphy styles should maintain their traditional forms and calligraphy rules. However, three participants, in their answer to the first question, agree that traditional calligraphy styles should not be modified under any condition, but their response to the second question indicates that they welcome minor modifications of traditional calligraphy styles for advertising applications, particularly large outdoor signs and neon signs.
Responses to the two questions reveal that the majority of participants base their answers on four assumptions. These assumptions caused participants to fear that modifying traditional calligraphy styles would result in unpleasant outcomes such as: (a) modifying traditional calligraphy would lead to a loss of cultural identity; (b) traditional calligraphy styles are “perfect.” Therefore, any modification would aesthetically destroy their perfection and beauty; (c) traditional calligraphy styles would be replaced with modified versions that are likely to be less satisfactory; (d) current calligraphers are less qualified and skilled when compared to the masters of calligraphy who created the traditional styles.

However, these four assumptions do not fully justify lack of modifications to traditional calligraphy styles in order to make them more compatible with modern communication and technology. First, modifying traditional calligraphy does not mean replacing it. For instance, the Naskh style has been modified in numerous ways over the past fifty years to produce typefaces for the press (see figure 37). However, the traditional Naskh style is still used and preferred for various applications. Another example can be found in modifications of the traditional Kufi style which occurs in hundreds of typefaces enhancing the communication and advertising industries. These two examples demonstrate that modifying traditional styles can produce advantages but not necessarily mean replacing or losing the traditional styles. Rather, the new styles are made use of in new ways.
Participants’ claim that traditional calligraphy styles are perfect is faulty. It is common knowledge that a typeface perfect for one application may not be suitable for another application, no matter how beautiful or legible a typeface is. Furthermore, a typeface should not be judged only on its visual appearance, but also on the effectiveness of how it meets its pre-determined function. For example, there are a number of typefaces that are designed to have a childish or a common handwriting appearance and these typefaces usually are not easy to read. However, these typefaces seem to be more attractive and appealing to young audiences than any other typeface. Common uses of such typefaces can be seen in numerous products, magazines, and advertisements for teenagers.

Moreover, the strong belief among the majority of participants that current calligraphers are less qualified and skilled when compared with the old calligraphy
masters is unfair, and even silly. The present state of industry and commerce requires artistic abilities and skills that are different from the kinds of skills required of calligraphy masters’ long ago. I agree with Omar, who explains that “the calligraphers who developed the traditional styles have made great achievements and I admire them, but I disagree with whomever said that creative all calligraphers have died. This belief undermines our artistic abilities” (interview, December 2002).

Three participants claim that traditional calligraphy styles “are appropriate for commercial and advertising uses without the need for any modification. The problem is however there are few people who know how to use them effectively in commercial art.” I find this statement to be in conflict with statements from the other participants, and with the general belief of professionals and critics throughout Arab countries. For example, Alnajdi (2001) believes that “without making some modification to the traditional Arabic letterforms to produce modern Arabic typefaces and fonts styles, I think it would be difficult to introduce creative artworks, especially in commercial and graphic design” (p. 40). Three participants support Alnajdi. They agree that it is necessary to make some adjustments in traditional styles before using them in commercial and advertising applications, “as long as it dose not demolish our identity,” (Majeed, interview, December 2002).

I find inconsistencies in Hameed’s statements when he states that traditional calligraphy styles are “perfect and suitable for advertising applications without a need for modifications” (interview, December 2002). Then, in his response to the follow up interview question, he says “it is necessary to slightly modify traditional calligraphy styles for advertising uses.” When, I asked him for clarification, He replied: “to make
them easier to read and more interesting.” It is reasonable to believe that if traditional calligraphy styles need to be easier to read and more interesting for advertisements, then they are not perfect and suitable. In addition, the tremendous demand and uses of freehand calligraphy styles in commercial art may be interpreted as a sign of difficulty involved when incorporating traditional styles into advertisements.

Several participants repeatedly comment on the modified Thuluth style, created by the calligrapher Saad Al-Zeyad in the Alsandooq Alaswad sign. It is a brave undertaking to modify Thuluth, the most highly regarded traditional calligraphy style for commercial use. Four participants support Al-Zeyad’s modifications, while two criticize them.

The modifications introduced by Al-Zeyad can be summarized as follows: (a) shortening the height of vertical letters, (b) eliminating tashkelat (vowel and decorative marks), (c) expanding the width of the strokes, and (d) slightly modifying the proportions and shapes of the letters. These modifications are minor adjustments made to enhance the appearance of the type in the sign. It is also worth mentioning here that traditional Thuluth is rarely used in advertisements and commercial arts. Considering the large size of the sign created in Thuluth and the fact that neon tubes are used for the type, I believe that Saad Al-Zeyad successfully modified the traditional Thuluth style to be visually more appealing and easy to read under these conditions.

Representation of Identity and Type Design

The Importance of Representing Identity in Calligraphy
Seven out of nine participants agree that representing Islamic identity in Arabic calligraphy and digital typefaces is an “important” consideration. One participant believes it is “somewhat important,” and another participant states that representing Islamic and Arabic identities in Arabic calligraphy is “not important.” He believes that the aesthetic appearance of typefaces is more important than representing Islamic and Arabic identities.

One participant explains that the importance of representing Islamic and Arabic identities in calligraphy and typeface is greater and more critical in advertising than other professions since “everyone is constantly looking at calligraphy and typefaces in advertising materials” (Badr, interview, December 2002). However, a large number of designers and calligraphers in Saudi Arabia are not aware of this important aspect. This lack of awareness can be seen in the practices of type designers and graphic designers who imitate Western type designs. It can also be seen, as Adel points out, in the calligraphy works produced by “foreign designers, in particular those from India and Pakistan, who are not concerned with representing Islamic and Arabic identities in the works they do” (interview, December 2002). Adel is probably right: these issues are critical and could contribute to the loss of our identity.

The majority of participants agree that representing cultural identity in typefaces is important matter. However, their suggested approach of imitating or slightly modifying traditional calligraphy styles to create new digital typefaces is problematic. This method not only limits creativity and produces technical difficulties, but it also forms a certain stereotype about the visual appearance of Arabic typefaces. For example, traditional calligraphy styles share three noticeable visual characteristics. First, they display visual
evidence of using a calligraphy or slanted felt-tip pen. Second, the strong transition in strokes from thick to thin and from thin to thick is distinctive in traditional styles. Third, *oblique* connection between letters is also distinctive in traditional calligraphy styles.

Maintaining these principles is a disadvantage for the Arabic type design industry, because maintaining these principles creates a number of major technical and financial obstacles in printing and computer technologies. These obstacles include, but are not limited to, the high costs of producing these typefaces, the requirements of special software specifically designed to handle them, and the extensive amount of time required to design and develop them.

**Identity and Major Modifications of Traditional Calligraphy**

Eight out of the nine participants agree that it is impossible to introduce major modifications to traditional calligraphy styles without negatively affecting their Islamic and Arabic appearances. Therefore, the majority of participants recommend maintaining the calligraphy rules and visual appearances of traditional styles without any changes. One participant states that, if type designs alter traditional calligraphy styles, these traditional styles will be lost as time passes and more modifications are performed. Thus, a number of participants feel that there is “a risk of losing our identity” if traditional calligraphy style are modified.

Only Omar believes it is possible to maintain identity while introducing major modifications to the calligraphy rules and visual appearances of traditional styles. He explains how Western cultures recognize and form stereotypes about the visual appearance of Arabic typefaces and calligraphy styles:
People from other countries and cultures think that Arabic calligraphy and typefaces are very decorative. That is true, but only in some traditional old styles such as Thuluth and Diwain. People in the West may not know that, these days, there are hundreds of less decorative typefaces and calligraphy styles … they might not even be aware of the fact that traditional calligraphy styles are being used less nowadays. This is because modern calligraphy and typefaces do not have very distinctive overall appearances yet.

Traditional calligraphy styles have very distinctive characteristics because they are usually ornamented, aesthetically attractive, and elegant; therefore, they are easily recognized and remembered, particularly by people from the West. Now, after [some of] these traditional calligraphy styles have been simplified, they became less distinctive and more difficult to recognize and remember (interview, December 2002).

What Omar explained above is the heart of the matter. Visual identity exists only when a viewer is able to recognize certain visual components. The more distinctive the visual characteristics of a typeface are, the easier the typeface can be recognized and remembered. When we fail to recall certain visual codes or unique visual features, we will be unable to identify or classify a typeface into a certain category.

It is possible to maintain cultural identity while introducing major modifications to the calligraphy rules and visual appearances of traditional styles. However, this requires talented and experienced type designers who can skillfully modify the overall the visual elements and codes that already exist in traditional calligraphy styles while maintaining or creating new visual codes to cleverly remind viewers of the Arabic and Islamic culture and its visual arts.

Moreover, in order to identify those visual codes which exist in traditional calligraphy styles, an extensive study of the traditional styles from graphic design’s perspective, rather than a calligraphy view is essential. A good example of introducing major modifications in a traditional calligraphy style while keeping visual codes as
reminders can be seen in Najm, designed by Murad Butros which is based on the traditional Kufi style.

Loss of Identity and Attempts of Modifying Typefaces

Participants were presented with and evaluated six digital typefaces in terms of representation of identity (see Appendix E). Participants also commented on the design aspects of these typefaces. The typefaces were arranged into three groups: (a) traditional calligraphy styles, Moshafi and Kufi Fatimi, (b) simplified/modified traditional styles, Farah and Najm, and (c) non-traditional typefaces, Ahmed and Yahya (see chapter three). Participants were then asked to respond to the following three questions:

1) Which typefaces or groups (A, B, C) do you believe represent the identity of Islamic and Arabic culture best? Please explain how you reached your conclusion.

2) Which typeface/typefaces do you believe to have modifications that resulted in the loss of Islamic and Arabic identity?

3) Can you identify visual codes that can contribute to making a typeface or calligraphy style more representational of Islamic and Arabic identities? If so, what are these visual codes?

Group A: Moshafi and Fatimi Kufi. Moshafi is a digital typeface representing traditional Naskh. Moshafi successfully maintains and truly represents the all the visual characteristics of traditional Naskh. Fatimi Kufi also represents the traditional Fatimi Kufi style. Similarities between the digital versions, Moshafi and Fatimi Kufi, and their traditional models caused all nine participants to agree that these two digital typefaces are the best in representing the identity of Islamic and Arabic culture when compared with the four other typefaces possibilities.
Since participants consider Moshafi and Fatimi Kufi typefaces beautiful and believe they are more appealing than the other four digital typefaces, it appears that all participants consider beauty the standard by which a typeface should be judged; an ill and unproductive evaluation method. The majority of participants failed to identify the visual codes in these digital typefaces that caused participants to consider them representative of cultural identity. Only one participant, Omar, is able to point out some visual characteristics or codes to explain how Moshafi and Fatimi Kufi typefaces visually characteristics of Islamic and Arabia culture. He identifies important traditional characteristics, including “a curvy line quality, extensive use of ornamentation, connecting words and letters together, and paying great attention to how words or a sentence would look as a whole” (interview, December 2002).

Identifying these fundamental visual and design aspects of traditional calligraphy styles is an essential key for any Arabic type designer to succeed in designing new digital typefaces and freehand calligraphy styles. Clearly, training in identifying these codes should be included as an important part of the education calligraphers receive.

**Group B: Farah typeface.** Four out of the nine participants believe that the Farah typeface represents Islamic and Arabic identity because it is based on the traditional Naskh style with some simplifications and modifications. However, five participants state that the Farah typeface “does not represent Islamic and Arabic identity and is ugly” (interviews, December 2002).

Seven participants strongly criticized Farah. One participant explains, “a very ugly, unacceptable, and poorly modified version of the traditional Naskh style.” Participants identify a number of design aspects which they consider as “problems.”
One participant claims that Farah is a mixture or modified combination of traditional Naskh and Riq’a. None of other eight participants agree with this claim. Evidently they were unable to find any visual link between Farah and traditional Riq’a, and were therefore unable to locate the basis upon which he makes his claim.

Two participants do not recommend combining calligraphy styles to create new typefaces. They consider this design approach “totally wrong.” However, review of literature for this study reveals that combining design ideas from different typefaces to create a new typeface is an effective design approach and a common practice among type designers in Europe and the United States.

Omar and Majeed made an astute observation when they point out that Farah is legible and easy to read and is a suitable typeface for advertising applications. Even though I did not ask participants for their opinion on the visual appearance of the Farah typeface, all participants discussed the visual design of the Farah. The majority of participants agree that Farah has an unpleasant appearance due to the lack of harmony and balance among the letters and words. Abdo claims that Farah “has awkward stroke-width transitions… sometimes the stroke is thick, then it suddenly gets very thin; this is wrong” (interview, December 2002).

It is true that Farah does not have an attractive and elegant appearance when compared with traditional Naskh style. However, Farah has particular design considerations meant to be used for commercial and advertisement purposes. These considerations may include making the letterforms legible and creating a sense of a strong, bold appearance when letters are connected. Considering the function of Farah as a display typeface, I believe the designer of the typeface has successfully achieved his
goals. Further, even though Farah was based on traditional Naskh, it is fruitless to compare it to traditional Naskh style since they have different uses and functions. For example, traditional Naskh is used for body text and never used as a display typeface.

**Group B: Najm typeface.** All participants agree that Najim typeface is based on the traditional Kufi style with some minor modifications. However, only three participants believe that Najm represents Islamic and Arabic identity. Unexpectedly, six participants found Najm unrepresentative of Islamic and Arabic identity even though several visual elements of traditional Kufi style are present in Najm.

Majeed and Omar consider Najm to be a beautiful typeface but the other three participants think the typeface is “unappealing.” Abdo explains, “Najm is just a foolish design and a laughing matter” (interview, December 2002). Three other participants consider Najm as neither beautiful nor unappealing, but a successful design. I believe that these participants are comparing the Najm typeface to varieties of traditional Kufi styles. In doing so, participants often see that Najm does not rise to the level of elegance and creativity of most of the traditional versions of Kufi styles and are therefore dissatisfied with it.

The loss of elegant quality in the majority of digital Kufi typefaces is the result of designers’ unsuccessful attempts to simplify the traditional Kufi style while still attempting to maintain some degree of elegance. The design of Najm is a response to this common problem.

Najm was designed to be easier to read than any other traditional version of the Kufi calligraphy style. At the same time, Najm is meant to be an elegant typeface that represents Arabic and Islamic cultural identity. I agree with Majeed and Omar who
consider Najm as a beautiful typeface. It is worth mentioning here that Majeed is an international award-winning traditional calligrapher, and Omar is the most respected modern calligrapher in the country. Therefore, their opinions carry more weight or may be more accurate.

**Group C: Ahmed typeface.** Participants’ responses to the Ahmed typeface are similar to Najm. For instance, two participants who believe Najm represents Islamic and Arabic identity find Ahmed also represents Arabic and Islamic cultural identity. Almost all six participants who consider Najm as “unappealing” and not representative of Islamic and Arabic cultural identity also agree that Ahmed is unattractive and too plain.

Participants’ similarity in response to Najm and Ahmed typefaces is due to participants belief that both Ahmed and Najm are based on the traditional Kufi calligraphy style. One participant explains that “Ahmed maintains the basic structure of letterforms of the traditional Kufi style” (Majeed, interview, December 2002). Omar, Hameed, and Majeed agree that Ahmed is easy to read and has a modern appearance. Omar also notices that the letterforms of Ahmed are “well-designed and in harmony with each other” (interview, December 2002).

However, Badr disagrees. He reveals two problems associated with Ahmed. According to Badr, Ahmed “takes up much space and is difficult to read” (interview, December 2002). While Ahmed does take up more space than other typefaces that are designed for body texts (e.g., Yakout, Nazanin, and Lotus by Linotype), Ahmed was not designed to be used for an entire body of text, but rather used as a display typeface.

Ahmed is based on the basic structure of traditional Kufi. However, it also may have some influences from the designs of Sans Serif Western typefaces. Figure 38
illustrates the similarity between Ahmed and Trade Gothic, a Western Sans Serif typeface. The Western influence and the simplicity of the design of Ahmed may have contributed to the typeface’s modern look. Ahmed’s simple and easy-to-read style has made it an attractive typeface choice for commercial and advertising uses, as Hameed points out. The fact that letterforms of Ahmed are reduced to their essence and have relatively uniform strokes makes it an easy-to-ready typeface. Moreover, one of the remarkable design aspects of Ahmed is that it solves the problem of long ascenders and descenders usually found in most Arabic typefaces.

![Comparison between Ahmed and Trade Gothic](image)

Figure 38: Comparison between the Ahmed Light typeface and the Latin font Eurostile Condensed (above); and Ahmed Bold and the Latin font Trade Gothic Bold Condensed (bottom).

Four participants suggest a number of modifications and adjustments to improve Ahmed. These suggestions seem to draw Ahmed closer to the design of simplified Kufi styles. For example, Abdo suggested making dots into perfect circles instead of squares, opening the right side of the letter Aeen and repositioning the letter Meem under the baseline instead of above it. These designs already exist in traditional Kufi. Only one
participant did not recommend redesigning the Ahmed typeface as he believes that if new changes are introduced to the design of Ahmed it will lose its essential characteristics.

**Group C: Yahya typeface.** The Yahya typeface draws all the participants’ attentions. All participants agree that Yahya does not represent Islamic and Arabic identity and is extremely difficult to read. They initially thought Yahya was a Western (English) typeface. Causes for these two obvious and major “problems,” as one participant points out, are: (a) Yahya lacks any visual connection with other Arabic typefaces, (b) its design is based on Western letterforms, and (c) the letters are disconnected.

It is not surprising that none of the nine participants is able to read Yahya except for Omar, and then only with significant difficulty. Since Yahya is almost an unreadable typeface, it could be considered unsuccessful, regardless of its intended use. Yahya cannot even be used as a decorative typeface as it is very likely to be taken as Western style since its letterforms are very similar to, or the same as those used in the West (i.e., English).

All participants strongly criticize the Yahya typeface. They label it as “unattractive, incorrect, foolish, worthless, and can not be fixed or improved” (interviews, December 2002). Yahya received similar criticism when it was first designed and submitted to the Egyptian Arabic Typeface Conference committee in 1950. The criticisms may be well-grounded: Yahya was designed over 50 years ago and has not been used since. Further, the typeface did not inspire type designers to create new typefaces based on its design principles.
However, the Yahya typeface has been discussed on a few Internet websites as a typeface style that solves a number of problems found in other Arabic typefaces. For example, Yahya introduced the separation of letters to allow the use of tracking and kerning “letter-spacing,” which is a typography design treatment not available in digital Arabic typeface where letters are connected. Yahya also introduced the idea of one shape per letter. This concept, if achieved in digital forms, would be one of the most major and useful improvements in the history of Arabic type design. Type designers should continue to search for new solutions to make Arabic typeface and writing system more compatible with new technologies and other contemporary forms of communication such as ACE (the Arabic Calligraphy Engine) and AAT (Apple Advanced Typography) which have made it possible to develop more attractive and higher quality Arabic typefaces.

Use of Nontraditional Typefaces for Printing the Qur’an

Participants were presented with six typefaces and asked the following two questions to express their attitudes and beliefs with respect to using nontraditional typefaces for printing the Qur’an:

1) How acceptable are the typefaces of groups (A), (B), and (C) for printing the Qur’an?

2) Is it appropriate to use Ahmed typeface (a nontraditional and contemporary typeface) for Qur’anic verses or passages? If not, please explain why.

The six typefaces were categorized into three groups. Group A including Moshafi and Kufi Fatimi (traditional typefaces); Group B are Farah and Najm (simplified traditional typefaces); Group C are Ahmed and Yahya (nontraditional typefaces). The majority of participants were surprised to be asked these questions. The reason is that
most participants believe the traditional Naskh style is the only appropriate typeface to be used for printing the Qur’an and Qur’anic verses.

Eight of nine participants agree that all typefaces in groups (B), Farah and Najm, and (C), Ahmed and Yahya, must not be used for printing the Qur’an. Several explanations were given including statements such as (a) traditional Naskh is the easiest to read and the most beautiful, (b) people are used to see the Qur’an being printed in traditional Naskh, and (c) traditional Naskh is flexible and does not take much space when compared with other traditional calligraphy styles and digital typefaces.

These claims are not necessarily shared by everyone. For example, one can argue that traditional Naskh is not the easiest typeface to read. Simplified versions of Naskh are easier to read than the traditional style. Traditional Nashk may be a beautiful calligraphy style but it is a widespread belief among calligraphers, critics, and the general public in Arab nations that traditional Thuluth style is the most beautiful and sophisticated Arabic style ever created. In addition, traditional Riq’a and Farsi styles take less space than traditional Naskh style.

However, Abdo brought an interesting perspective to the question. He explained that using traditional Naskh is a way of regarding the holy Qur’an with great respect and honor. Another participant also pointed out that “old people, who are used to see the Qur’an printed in traditional Naskh, will not be able to read nontraditional typefaces [e.g., Farah, Najm, Ahmed, and Yahya]” (interview, December 2002). These two perspectives are more convincing and thoughtful.

Eight participants agreed that the Ahmed typeface should not be used for the Qur’an or the traditions of the Prophet Mohamed. Participants state three reasons for this
conclusion. First, Ahmed does not represent Islamic and Arabic cultural identity. Second, it takes so much more space in comparison with the traditional Naskh. Third, Ahmed is not as appealing and as easy to read as traditional Naskh.

Only one participant (Omar) believes that Ahmed could be used for printing the Qur’an. He explains that “any typeface that is easy to read and visually pleasing, such as Farah and Ahmed, can be used for printing the Qur’an” (interview, December 2002). He even argues that Farah might be easier to read than the traditional Naskh style for the majority of young people who are exposed to simplified traditional and modern typefaces in their everyday activities such as reading books, magazines, and newspapers, watching television, and using the Internet. Omar’ perspective is logical and convincing, as simplified Naskh typefaces are the standard for printing books, textbooks, newspapers, and Internet text in all Arab nations including, Saudi Arabia. However, it is important to remember that the majority of Muslims read the Qur’an almost on a daily basis. The traditional Naskh style is has always been used for printing the Qur’an. Even though I agree with Omar that people are more exposed to simplified Naskh typefaces than traditional Naskh, I do not believe that using the customary Naskh style will present any reading difficulties for younger generations who are already accustomed to it.

None of the participants comments on one important issue: the time and cost efficiency of printing the Qur’an using simplified digital Naskh typefaces. I am not sure whether participants are aware of this aspect. However, one might ask, if the claim by eight of the nine participants that the traditional calligraphy Naskh style is the most beautiful and easy to read typeface, why is it not used in printing textbooks and newspapers? The answer may be that, traditional Nashk is not the easiest typeface to
read. Moreover, using traditional Naskh in printing books and newspapers is not economically prudent and often results in computer and press problems.

**Influence of Western Type Design**

The practice of creating new Arabic typefaces based on Western type designs has become more common in the past ten years. This practice has been a concern for a large number of critics and designers who believe it may have a negative impact on Islamic and Arabic cultural identity existing in traditional Arabic calligraphy and typefaces. I asked participants their opinions about the possible reasons for basing new Arabic typefaces on Western designs and whether there is a risk of losing Islamic and Arabic identities as a result of the practice.

One participant believes that some non-Arabian agencies support and encourage Saudi and other Arabic type designers to base the design of the typefaces they create on Western designs. He believes that the creation of the Yahya typeface is a perfect example of this practice. However, he did not provide any evidence demonstrating the involvement of non-Arabian agencies in the process of designing Yahya typeface.

Another participant has a different perspective. He explains that some type designers want to be more creative and to have a more modern look and style for the typefaces they design. He argues that Arabic type designers must go to traditional Islamic and Arabic arts for inspiration rather than to Western arts and designs. Even though traditional Arabic calligraphy is a treasure of inspiration, Western and other cultures’ arts can be useful sources of inspiration as well. The important issue is that type designers should be aware of the existence and impact of differences in the visual codes imbedded
in Islamic and Western arts. Such awareness would definitely assist designers in
maintaining cultural identities in their designs.

Interviews with participants show that they are not aware of the presence of visual
codes in calligraphy styles. The majority of participants fail to identify a single visual
code that makes a particular typeface representative of Islamic and Arabic cultural
identity. It seems only Omar is aware of, and can identify the main visual codes existing
in traditional Arabic calligraphy. He also comments about developing stereotypes about
particular cultural art forms. Participants agreed that Omar successfully created a large
number of typefaces and calligraphy styles that have modern and attractive appearances
and yet maintain Islamic and Arabic identity.

During the interview, one participant was glad to show me a typeface that he
designed based on a Western Serif typeface. In this typeface, he incorporates, without any
modifications, the shapes of the Serifs and maintains the basic structure of the Western
typeface design as mush as possible. This participant believes he has succeeded in
creating a modern and interesting Arabic typeface. However his design process did not
show any new design methods and the typeface looks similar to the common Western-
based Arabic typefaces that already exist. Overall, the typeface lacks unique features and
creativity.

Another participant gave two reasons for his recommendation against using use
Western typeface designs as the foundation for creating new Arabic typefaces. First
Western letterforms look very different from Arabic letterforms. Second, Western
letterforms are disconnected, while the beauty of Arabic calligraphy relies on the fact that
the letterforms are connected and the words are linked in a variety of ways. These two
design aspects are important and should be considered when Arabic type designers look for inspiration from Western type design.

Two participants argue that the practice of creating Arabic digital typefaces based on Western typeface designs is due to the lack of calligraphy skills and creativity of some type designers. This assumption might be true in some cases, particularly in Saudi Arabia, since a large number of digital type designers are computer programmers and graphic designers with no formal education and little expertise in the field of type design (typography).

However, the two participants’ assumption that those who design new Arabic typefaces based on Western type designs lack strong calligraphy skills cannot be substantiated. Even though the disciplines of calligraphy and type design (typography) are related and share many design aspects, each profession requires specific knowledge, skills, and tools. The art of calligraphy for example, requires strong hand flexibility and control, while digital type design does not. Moreover, Arabic professional calligraphers have demonstrated that it is very possible to accomplish extraordinary achievements in the art of calligraphy with little or no background in graphic design and its tools whereas knowledge of graphic design and its tools is essential for any digital type designer.

Badr explained that “creating new digital Arabic typefaces based on Western typeface designs has become a design trend nowadays … and would fade soon away” (interview, December 2002). He added that the practice is due to attempts of designers to create “modern” designs. His view shows lack of in-depth knowledge of historical typeface design. The participant may not aware that type designers have been creating digital Arabic typefaces based on Western typeface designs as early as the mid-1950’s.
However, widespread increase the practice of basing Arabic typeface design on Western models did not occur until the late 1980’s, when personal computers and font design software became available and affordable not only to designers but also to the general public. As the practice has been ongoing for more than 50 years, it is unlikely to fade in the near future. Rather, the variety in approaches and techniques as result of greater accessibility to Western design could increase. Arabic type designers might benefit from developing a broader view of the type design profession by considering Western type designs as sources of inspiration for ideas, themes, styles, and design approaches, rather than a source of pattern and motif designs.

Only two out of nine participants have a good understanding of this issue. One participant stated that “borrowing and modifying design ideas from Western typefaces are acceptable practices and should not be a problem nor practice that demolishes our identity” (interview, December 2002). The other participant explained how a type design could incorporate different styles from different cultures:

It is just like when Arabic musicians incorporate Turkish and Indian melodies or rhythms in their music and you, as a listener, can hear these non-Arabic melodies, but you feel the music is definitely Arabic and we enjoy this kind of music. The important thing here is that musicians should incorporate non-Arabic melodies in such a way that does not overpower the Arabic music essence. I do not see anything bad about this (Hameed, interview, December 2002).

To summarize, six participants express concern and believe there is a major risk of losing Islamic and Arabic cultural identity if Western typeface designs are used as basis for Arabic fonts. Three participants do not see any risk of such practices. Two of the three participants are known for their strong interest in Freehand calligraphy and modifications of existing digital Arabic typefaces.
Calligraphy and Type Design Education in Saudi Arabia

Participants’ Perceptions on Calligraphy and Type Design Education

Participants were asked how satisfied they are with the level of teaching calligraphy and type design in Saudi Arabia. All participants, in their responses, were focused only on traditional calligraphy education. Eight of the nine participants state that they are not satisfied with the level of calligraphy education in public elementary and junior high schools. Only one participant stated that he is “somewhat satisfied” with the level of calligraphy education in Saudi Arabia. Later however, he stated that calligraphy education in schools has not reached an “acceptable level.”

All participants agree that the unsatisfactory level of calligraphy education in the country is due to lack of (or lessening of) public and governmental interest in calligraphy. Participants were unable to provide convincing explanations of the causes of this decline of interest but agree that the decline results from emerging computer and printing technologies. Even though participants were focusing only on calligraphy when discussing educational issues, I believe that teaching and learning about digital typeface design is becoming more and more relevant at this time and should be included in the curricula of potential schools for teaching graphic design. Traditional calligraphy should also be taught, as it is one of the most highly regarded forms of art in Arab countries and has unique artistic aspects.

Even though calligraphy is taught in public elementary and junior high schools and also at the Alkaateb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy (AIAC) in Riyadh, four participants agree that Arabic calligraphy education does not exist in Saudi Arabia. Calligraphers learn on their own either from friends or from books” (Abdo, interview,
December 2002). This statement is somewhat overstated. Only two participants recognize the AIIAC as an educational institution for teaching calligraphy. These two participants consider the AIIAC an “unsuccessful institution.”

Participants’ narrow vision of the functions and purposes of calligraphy and type design education were unexpected. Interviews reveal that they see calligraphy and type design education as a set of schools for teaching traditional Arabic calligraphy in manner similar to the Calligraphy Institute in Riyadh (which closed in the late 1980’s) and traditional Egyptian schools for teaching calligraphy (see p. 138 for a suggested school model from a participant). Participants also see calligraphy education as a program or mechanism for producing professional calligraphers who are able to skillfully perform calligraphy works in traditional styles rather than educating knowledgeable and creative type designers.

All participants are disappointed with the quality of calligraphy education in public schools in Saudi Arabia. One participant explains “it seems as if it [calligraphy education in public schools] does not exist” (interview, December 2002). Six participants pointed out an important issue regarding teaching calligraphy in public schools: the calligraphy teacher is usually the science or reading teacher and not the art teacher. A number of factors contribute to this awkward situation. First, art teachers do not necessarily have more knowledge in calligraphy than reading or science teachers, as calligraphy is not a required subject in Art Education Departments in colleges and universities. Second, calligraphy class in public schools is viewed as unimportant, usually used to alleviate the busy schedule of the science teacher. Third, the curriculum of the calligraphy class is pre-designed by the Ministry of Education with a provided textbook.
(a collection of phrases set in traditional Naskh and Riqa calligraphy styles used as templates for students to copy); thus, it is assumed by many that any teacher can teach calligraphy just by following the book.

A separate class devoted to teaching and practicing calligraphy is not an efficient solution at the present time. Rather, students should improve their handwriting in writing class and learn about the artistic aspects and history of calligraphy in their art classes. This strategy does not suggest learning less about calligraphy, but rather modifying the direction and method of teaching and learning about calligraphy. By including calligraphy in art classes, students (as well as the public and the government) would begin to regard calligraphy as an art form and not just a vehicle for improving students’ handwriting.

**Calligraphy Education and Saudi Industry’s Needs**

The majority of participants in this study are professional calligraphers who have worked for long periods of time in the advertising profession. Therefore, it is beneficial to gain their opinions on whether the calligraphy and graphic design education in the country meets the needs and demands of the advertising industry. All nine participants strongly believe that current calligraphy and design education in the country does not furnish the advertising industry with qualified calligraphers and designers.

Two participants argue that teaching traditional calligraphy is “not useful for today’s advertising profession.” They recommend teaching more about design, drawing, computer and graphic software, and creativity. However, it seems the Saudi advertising industry, as any advertising industry in the world, requires not only calligraphers but graphic designers as well. It is somewhat surprising and disappointing that only a few
participants recognized the need for both calligraphers and graphic designers. In order to supply qualified designers and calligraphers for the advertising industry, establishing schools that teach both graphic design and commercial arts is a must.

**Improving Calligraphy and Type Design Education**

Participants were asked the following questions regarding improving calligraphy and type design education:

1) How can the teaching of calligraphy in Saudi Arabia be improved?

2) Is there a need for establishing schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design in Saudi Arabia?

3) What are your recommendations concerning functions, missions, and curricula of schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design?

In response to the above three questions, participants offered several recommendations for improving current calligraphy education and also suggested a number of new policies to establish an effective calligraphy and graphic design education in the country.

**Establishing schools for teaching calligraphy and design.** In Saudi Arabia, Fine Arts schools and schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design do not exist. The Saudi government has rejected several proposals for establishing Fine Arts schools or allowing Fine Arts majors in colleges and universities in the country. The reasons for such rejection are based mainly on religious considerations. A full explanation has not been, and is not likely to be, publicized by the government. Nevertheless, several books have been published and small booklets have been made available to the public free of charge on the prohibition of figurative painting and sculpture supported by many religious scholars in Saudi Arabia.
Therefore, even though there may be a significant and urgent need for establishing Fine Art schools, this is unlikely in the near future. Religious issues could be resolved by establishing schools for teaching art forms that do not involve realistic drawings of figures, humans, and animals. Art forms of this kind could have a more industrial and economic function, and may gain approval from the Saudi government, religious organizations, and scholars because they would economically benefit the country. These art forms could include, but not be limited to, commercial art, graphic design, interior design, photography, industrial design, and interactive multimedia design.

A proposal for submission to the Saudi government to establish design schools should be carefully developed and include three sections. The first section would thoroughly address and define the importance of particular art forms (e.g., graphic design, interior design, and industrial design) for the country’s industries and economy. The second section would address the objectives and describe the outcomes of establishing these schools. The third section would outline the financial, staff, and equipment requirements for establishing a model school.

The private sector should also be involved, especially financially, in funding design schools in the country. A proposal soliciting financial support from the private sector should include a detailed explanation of how and in what ways these organizations would profit from the establishment and administration of these schools.

A dialogue between religious scholars, artists, and administrators in the Ministry of Education may be an effective way to discuss how art and design education institutions might be established in the country. The dialogue would provide practical methods to
overcome the current situation of having an urgent need for qualified Saudi designers and artists for the industry on one hand while lacking such professionals on the other.

**Conventional schools versus extracurricular activities.** Seven out of the nine participants agree that potential schools for teaching calligraphy and design should hold only evening classes lasting an hour or two. They believe that, by holding evening classes, students can attend public schools or have jobs during the day. One participant suggests that classes at calligraphy and design schools should be viewed as extracurricular activities.

However, the idea of evening classes as extracurricular activities is not an effective strategy to supply the Saudi industries with the numbers of professional designers and calligraphers needed. Rather conventional schools and institutes for teaching calligraphy and design should be established. Further, calligraphy and design education should be considered “majors” in universities and colleges. It is important that teaching art and design not be perceived as less significant than other areas of study at universities around the country if these areas of study are to attract creative and intelligent students.

**Public and private schools.** Four participants preferred that the government establish, fund and administer future calligraphy and design schools. They gave two reasons for their opinion. First, private organizations are unlikely to have the financial capital to establish and run large schools. Second, “most people [in Saudi Arabia] have more faith in public schools than private ones” (Hameed, interview, December 2002). It is impossible to verify these claims at the present time and therefore should not be taken as statements of fact.
In the past decade, however, a number of private K-12 schools have been established and have demonstrated they can deliver higher quality education and services than public K-12 schools. Two participants prefer private schools for teaching calligraphy and design. They claim the government is not interested in establishing Fine Arts schools of any kind and will not fund or support schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design. There is some truth to this statement. As mentioned earlier, the government has rejected several proposals for establishing Fine Arts schools or allowing Fine Arts majors in universities and colleges. Therefore, establishment of private schools may be one way to accommodate lack of Fine Artists and graphic designers in the country.

Even though the idea of private schools for teaching arts is appealing, it may be more difficult to interest the private sector in establishing such schools. Yet, if private organizations participate in founding and funding Fine Arts schools, they may open the door to greater art education in the country. Since private industry has a vested in increased numbers of graphic designers, calligraphers, and typographers where the government does not, the number of privately funded schools is likely to be larger than schools established under government control.

**Certification, letter of completion, and ijaza.** Six participants emphasized the importance of granting calligraphy students a certification or diploma when they graduate rather than a letter of completion, as in the case of Alkaateb Institute in Riyadh. Participants believe that granting students ijazas (see Chapter two, p. 67) signed by reputable calligraphy teachers is not practical any more.
Although the practice of obtaining ijazas from accomplished calligraphers has always been highly regarded. It is still true in Arab nations that a calligrapher who has been granted an ijaza from a master calligrapher is more respected among professional calligraphers than a calligrapher with certification from a school of calligraphy. There is no reason why the practice of granting ijaza to professional calligraphers cannot be pursued concurrently by students attending schools granting certification in graphic design or calligraphy. Ijazas and certifications can coexist without any conflict. One should not be viewed as replacement for the other.

Only one participant believes that calligraphy certification is unimportant. He may have been thinking only of small calligraphy institutes when he made his remark. However, his opinion does show that some calligraphers consider calligraphy and type design a “craft” rather than a broad art subject which can be studied at the same level as other subjects at schools and universities.

**Foci and curricula.** It was not a surprise all nine participants agreed that teaching traditional calligraphy styles must be included in the curriculum of future calligraphy and graphic design schools. It is also not surprising that some participants recommended that schools provide some calligraphy classes in a traditional way where students copy what their calligraphy teacher writes on the blackboard (interview, December 2002).

Majority of participants also recommended classes on the history of traditional calligraphy, including major eras from pre-Islamic, early Islamic, Umayyad, Abbasid, to Ottoman. No participants, however, included the aesthetic aspects of contemporary calligraphy in their responses.
Only one participant suggested studying modern and freehand calligraphy, (especially the practical aspects of it), while another did not recommend teaching freehand calligraphy at all. The second participant believes freehand calligraphy is impossible to teach, because it has no rules or principles to follow. His opinion reveals a misunderstanding about the main objectives of teaching and learning about art. He likely believes teaching consists of delivering a set of instructions, rules, and formulas to be memorized and followed by students. In contrast, freehand calligraphy is based upon developing creative abilities. For example, when teaching freehand calligraphy, art topics such as harmony, balance, motion, expression, and creativity must be discussed. These discussions will be of a different sort than those conducted about traditional calligraphy.

Majority of participants strongly recommended that design be the dominant focus in the curriculum of potential calligraphy and design schools. One participant went even further to say that potential “schools should supply the Saudi industry with what it needs and demands: graphic designers, not traditional calligraphers…. Graphic designers know how to draw, paint, use computer and graphic software, and have knowledge in color theories. This is the successful designer that we should be looking for these days” (Omar, interview, December 2002).

Although there is an urgent need for graphic designers in the advertising profession in Saudi Arabia (as discussed earlier) the need should not dictate graphic design as the most important area of study in potential Fine Arts schools. There is also a great need for other art professionals such as photographers and interior designers who also serve the advertising industry.
Other suggested subjects to be included in the curricula of potential Fine Art schools include drawing, printmaking, art appreciation, photography, Islamic ornamentation, and computer and graphic software. Participants acknowledged the importance of these areas, however, the majority failed to see these areas as separate fields of study.

**Suggested model for calligraphy schools.** The ideal schools for teaching calligraphy suggested by Abdo and four other participants follows a common model for teaching traditional calligraphy based on Egyptian calligraphy institutions (see Chapter four, p. 138). It was also the model chosen and adopted for the Institute of Calligraphy in Riyadh before it was closed.

This model has proven to be an effective model for teaching traditional calligraphy, however, majority of calligraphers who graduated from such schools have been unable to succeed in the fields of type design and typography (designing typefaces for the press and computer and designing text-based layouts). In contrast, a large number of successful Arab type designers and typographers have strong backgrounds and expertise in graphic design or architecture with little to moderate skills in traditional calligraphy.

**Improving Calligraphy and Advertising Professions**

**Suggestions for Improvements**

Participants offer a number of suggestions and ideas for improving the calligraphy and advertising professions in Saudi Arabia. Emphasis seemed to be on the importance of establishing schools for teaching calligraphy and graphic design in the country to
improve the number of highly qualified and creative calligraphers and designers for the graphic design industry.

Seven participants suggested organizing more calligraphy exhibitions in the country to encourage professional as well as potential calligraphers to practice and learn more about the art of calligraphy. Several other suggestions were offered to expose the public to more calligraphy and Islamic arts. These suggestions include offering workshops, publishing more articles in newspapers, organizing lectures, and creating television programs on calligraphy and Islamic arts. Participants also recommended increasing the number of calligraphy books on the market and reducing their prices. It makes sense to think that when the public knows more about calligraphy, it would be more likely to appreciate and expand support for it.

A number of participants’ suggestions are somewhat unrealistic or difficult to achieve. For example, they suggest that painters, graphic designers, and calligraphers organize and host informal meetings at their homes as a way to learn from each other. As calligraphers, participants hope to organize frequent meetings where they learn about color theories from painters and about the principles of design from graphic designers. Organizing such meetings are likely to be difficult, since the majority of artists, designers, and calligraphers are busy and/or might not be interested in sharing their ideas.

Two participants agreed that the government should give financial support to professional calligraphers and graphic designers “who would like to turn their love of calligraphy into a profession by opening their own calligraphy shops or graphic design agencies” (interview, December 2002). The government is unlikely to meet this demand, at least in the near future.
The suggestion by three participants that *only certified calligraphers* should be eligible to apply for licenses to open calligraphy shops seems odd, because there are no schools or institutions to offer degrees or certificates in calligraphy or design. However, government could require successful completion of an examination before granting a license to open a calligraphy shop or advertising agency. An examination on artistic and/or creative abilities may be somewhat problematic, as there are no standards by which these things might be judged. Therefore, the result of such an exam might be based on personal preferences of the examiners.

The requirement to obtain a license to open a calligraphy shop is still an unsolved matter since the government closed the Calligraphy Institute in the late 1980’s. Submitting a certificate in calligraphy has been omitted from the application for a license to open a calligraphy shop. Elimination of this requirement allows unqualified individuals to officially open calligraphy shops and advertising agencies creating major problems for the industry.

The Ministry of Broadcasting should not allow individuals from India and Pakistan to work as calligraphers in Saudi sign-making shops unless they demonstrate fluency in speaking and writing of the Arabic language. Misspellings in outdoor signs and other advertisements are embarrassing but understandable when individuals lack sufficient knowledge of the language.

One participant offered a useful suggestion. He recommended that the Ministry of Broadcast classify calligraphy shops, sign makers, and advertising agencies based on their specialties and capabilities. He suggests an A, B, C, and D ranking system where an “A” rank (within its classification of specialty) is the highest or most capable company to
carry out complex and major design work. I believe that the implementation of this ranking system would create greater competitions among advertising agencies to improve their work because they wish to advance to a higher level in the ranking system. It would also, as the participant believes, give the public a general idea about the capacity of sign makers and graphic design agencies so that they make better choices.

Another solution to the problematic outcomes of the differences in the estimated costs of artworks at calligraphy shops and advertising agencies is that all sign makers should “agree on and follow a certain method to estimate the cost of making signs” (Salem, interview, December 2002). This solution is not useful and may give birth to other problems. For example, when designers are forced to charge the same amount of money for the artworks they create, they might be encouraged to lower the quality and creativity of their artwork, use lower quality materials, or reduce the time they spend on their work.

Omar recommended establishing a stronger copyright law in the country. This issue has been of major concern among artists (e.g., painters, calligraphers, designers, singers, and writers) in Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia. A strong copyright law would protect artists and encourage them to be more creative and original in their artworks and idea, which would then improve all art-related professions, including calligraphy and advertising.

**Characteristics of Today’s Calligrapher Working in the Advertising Industry**

Today’s advertising industry demands different qualifications and expertise from calligraphers and graphic designers than in the past. Constant changes in society, the advertising industry, and consumers’ needs must be accommodated. Recognizing the
importance of change in the kind of expertise professional calligraphers needed to meet today’s challenges, a few participants suggested future calligraphers learn to operate computers and use graphic software. However, students cannot achieve expertise in graphic design software and advertising layout when there are no schools teaching these subjects in the country.

Seven participants emphasize the importance of having strong traditional calligraphy skills to work in today’s advertising industry. With due respect to participants, low to moderate skills in traditional calligraphy combined with creativity and knowledge of the graphic design field have proven sufficient for achieve success in the advertising industry. The well-known designers, Saad Al-Zeyad and Abd Elrahman Al-Hawimal, are excellent examples of successful Saudi calligraphers and designers working in the advertising profession. They both have moderate-level skills in traditional calligraphy but have strong creative design abilities and a reasonable understanding of the Saudi advertising industry.

Participants also recommended that a successful calligrapher for the current Saudi advertising industry should have a strong imagination and wide knowledge in visual arts and calligraphy (both traditional and modern). These requirements should be seen not only as requirements for success, but also as basic foundations for any calligrapher and designer working in the advertising industry.

One participant made an interesting recommendation for today’s calligraphers working in the advertising profession. He suggested students of calligraphy would benefit from the ability to “draw letterforms using pencil and not a calligraphy pen, so that he would have more possibilities in creating numerous styles, including a modern
appearance” (Omar, interview, December 2002). This comment shows a deep understanding of the art of type and letterform designs. For decades, professional type designers in Europe, the USA, and Arab nations have found drawing letterforms with pencils the most efficient and rewarding method for creating new typefaces. However, some type designers, particularly beginners and those who are interested in creating scripted-looking typefaces, still use calligraphy pens to create typefaces. Some professional type designers combine these two techniques, as they use two pencils to form two line-guides when creating their typefaces. The advantage of using two pencils is that the designer can quickly and easily draw the basic shape of a letterform particularly when designing text typefaces, easily modifying the lines the two pencils make, and verifying the width of letterforms.

Having some understanding of the advertising and marketing fields would be an advantage for any artist (e.g., calligraphers, graphic designers, interior designer, and photographers) working in the advertising industry. For instance, understanding consumers’ needs and knowledge of marketing and promotion strategies can greatly assist in making any design project succeed in meeting the intended and projected outcomes.

Summary

In this chapter, I analyzed, discussed and commented on major issues presented in chapter four. First, I discussed the role and function of the Alkaateb Institute for Improving Arabic Calligraphy in Alqateeef city (AIIAC) in the country. Strength and weak aspects of the AIIAC were pointed out and discussed. Recommendations and suggestions for improving the institute were also presented in this chapter. Overall, all
nine participants agree that the AIIAC role does not rise to expectations as an educational institution for teaching calligraphy.

Second, I discussed the importance, purposes, and objectives of the AIIAC. The organization plays a positive role in promoting the art of traditional calligraphy in the country. It has organized calligraphy exhibitions, provided workshops and public lectures on traditional calligraphy. More calligraphy organizations like this one are needed and they should not be limited to those having governmental support. Calligraphy organizations should expand their efforts in publications and seek financial assistance from the private sector.

In the last section of this chapter, I analyzed and commented upon the outcomes of interviews with the nine participants and their responses to the follow-up questionnaires. I also provided recommendations and suggestion when appropriate, on several issues including the difficulties facing Saudi calligraphers and type designers, modification of traditional calligraphy, representation of identity in typeface design, and calligraphy education and profession in Saudi Arabia. The following chapter offers a conclusion of this study and it makes suggestions for further studies.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Modifying Traditional Calligraphy Styles

This study suggests modifying traditional Arabic calligraphy styles in order to better accommodate contemporary communication needs, particularly in the advertising industry, computer, and press technologies. Modification should not be taken as destroying or replacing traditional calligraphy styles. Rather should be regarded as a consideration of traditional Arabic calligraphy styles for inspiration in creating new typefaces that embody cultural identity. This view of modifying traditional calligraphy styles will contribute to solving a major concern identified by majority of participants in this study: the risk of losing Arabic cultural identity as a result creating Arabic typefaces based on Western typeface designs.

However, modifying traditional calligraphy styles for commercial use requires high quality type designers. The qualifications include strong background in graphic design, expertise in font design software, and knowledge of Arabic calligraphy. Drawing skills would be helpful as well, but are not essential. Currently, designers with such skills and knowledge are extremely rare individuals in Saudi Arabia. Lack of well qualified type designer’s likely results from their thin knowledge of, and skills in graphic design.
Lack of knowledge and skills on the part of graphic designers, type designers, and calligraphers may be due to the insufficient education they receive in these subject areas.

**Further Suggested Studies for Establishing Fine Art Schools**

Participants in this study expressed their dissatisfaction with the calligraphy and graphic design education in Saudi Arabia. They emphasized the importance of improving current Art Education and calligraphy education in public schools. They also expressed their desire for establishing calligraphy, graphic design, and Fine Art schools for Saudi industry.

Other fine art areas (i.e., interior design, painting, drawing, printmaking, and photography) also provide important background knowledge for graphic designers and calligraphers working in the Saudi advertising industry. However until now, all proposals for establishing Fine Art schools have been rejected by the government.

Alghamedy (1986) points out that “art education curriculum guidelines developed by the Ministry of Education (1974) states that the study of the human figure and making of statutes of any kind of being shall not be included in the teaching activities of art education” (p. 12). Ministry of Education policy is in keeping with the official religion (Islam) which prohibits painting and making statutes of humans and animals. These prohibitions are very likely reasons for governmental rejection of proposals for establishing Fine Art schools.

However, schools for teaching art forms that do not usually involve the study of human figures and making of statutes (e.g., calligraphy, graphic design, and interior design) could and should be considered. To this end, additional research is needed to
investigate and identify problems involved establishing schools for teaching art forms that do not involve realistic drawings of human figures and making of statues.

It is also suggested future researchers examine strategies for obtaining governmental approval for establishing Fine Art schools. The process could be divided into two stages. The first stage would consist of developing a proposal for establishing *Design Schools* whose curriculum would be limited to art forms consistent with the country’s religion, objectives, and regulations. These art forms could include graphic design, calligraphy, industrial design, interior design, and photography. After successfully gaining governmental approval, Design Schools would be established providing foundation for the second stage. In the second stage, a proposal would be developed and submitted to the government requesting inclusion of other Fine Art fields of study, such as painting, drawing and sculpture in the Design School curriculum.

Developing governmental proposals of this kind is not an easy task. It may be necessary to conduct a survey investigating the opinions of individuals from the education, art, religious, university/high school student, and general public sectors about establishing schools for teaching art forms that do not involve *realistic* drawings of human figures and making of statues. Individuals to be surveyed in the Education Sector may include administrators from Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Administrates at King Saud University and other educational institutions. Participants from art sector could include artists, designers, advertising agencies, and art teachers. Individuals from the religious sector may include leaders from Islamic centers, mosques, and Islamic organizations.
Additional recommended studies include the following:

- Identifying the kinds of fine art forms that are needed by Saudi industry and are also religiously acceptable in Saudi Arabia.

- Developing the most effective strategies for gaining support from private organizations for establishing and funding schools of graphic design and calligraphy.

- Collecting perspectives of the public on the importance of establishing *Fine Art Schools* in the country.

- Examining previously submitted proposals for establishing Fine Art schools in the country to determine arguments presented. This examination would assist in identification of strength and weakness of the proposals, which would be valuable in developing new proposals.

**Applications of Suggested Studies**

Together, outcomes of these studies would provide a solid base upon which to build proposals for the two-stage establishment of schools for teaching calligraphy, graphic design, interior design, painting, drawing, and sculpture. They would also provide valuable data useful in: (a) identifying the most effective and productive approaches for obtaining governmental approval for establishing schools for Fine Art; (b) developing new strategies for improving the current graphic design and calligraphy education in the country; (c) attracting public and governmental attention to the importance and need of establishing schools for teaching Fine arts and related areas of art study.

The two-stage strategy could also provide valuable information and a useful guide for establishing of schools of music, which is also a very difficult task because, in Saudi Arabia, religious scholars believe Islam prohibits playing or listening to music. Therefore, there are no music classes in public schools at any level. Advertisements for
private music classes have never been published in public newspapers or in ads in Saudi Arabia (as they are very likely to be prohibited).

The significant finding of this study indicates that in order to maintain the art of calligraphy (one of the most important cultural identities of Islamic and Arabic culture), a deep understanding of calligraphy, its historical development, and its role in society is essential. This understanding would assist in protecting the art of Arabic calligraphy and typeface design from Western influence, as pointed by the majority of participants of this study. This influence may demolish the characteristics and significance of Arabic calligraphy. Establishing schools for teaching Arabic calligraphy and Islamic art would provide students with the desired knowledge and understanding that assist them to maintain their cultural identity.

The cultural identity of a civilization is deeply rooted in its arts and languages. The art of calligraphy can play a significant role as a symbolic representation of the cultural identity of Arabic and Islamic civilizations. Alnajdi (2001) believes that “the identity of Islamic culture is expressed perfectly through the traditional forms of Arabic calligraphy, which effectively promote the inherited beliefs and traditions of Muslims and Arabs” (p. 99).

Findings of this study suggested that Arabic calligraphy should be honored by establishing schools for teaching it, founding museums and organizing more calligraphy art exhibitions to promote the art of calligraphy and Islamic art in Saudi Arabia.
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APPENDIX A

SAMPLES OF ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY
Calligraphy by Mamdoh Al-Shareef.
Leaf from a Qur'an manuscript. (13th–14th century)
Ink, colors, and gold on vellum; 21 1/16 x 22 in.
Source: http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/department.asp?dep=14
Samples of the most popular calligraphy styles by Fu'ad Astafan
Source: Kamil Al-Baba, 1983, p. 287.
APPENDIX B

SAMPLE OF ARABESQUE
Geometric arabesque.
APPENDIX C

SAMPLES OF ARABESQUE AND CALLIGRAPHY APPLIED ON VARIOUS SURFACES
Calligraphy applied on a bowl, 10th century. Earthenware, red body, white engobe, underglaze painted. Attributed to Nishapur, Iran. Source: http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/department.asp?dep=14

Mosque lamp, late 13th century.
Glass; free blown, enameled and gilded. Attributed to Egypt or Syria.
Source: http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/department.asp?dep=14

Plaque, 17th century
Cut and pierced steel. Attributed to Iran
Source: http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/department.asp?dep=14
Pair of doors. Wood inlaid with carved ivory panels
Attributed to Cairo, Egypt
Size: 65 x 30 1/2 in.
Source: http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/department.asp?dep=14
APPENDIX D

SAMPLES OF COMBINING CALLIGRAPHY AND ARABESQUE
Combination of calligraphy and geometric and vegetal arabesque applied to a page from a Qur'an.
APPENDIX E

DIGITAL TYPEFACES USED DURING THE INTERVIEWS
Moshafi typeface designed by Hamid Al-Saadi (above), and Kufi Fatimi typeface typeface designed by Mamoun Sakkal (below).
قامت شركة بطرس الدولية للإستشارات والتصميم
اللاعتبار إمكان تكيفها لتشمل من قبل إجمالي التصميم
لمدف استعمالها في تنضيد النصوص، من كتب ومجلات
العربي على إجمالي الكمبيوتر الشخصية، دخول الخط
التقنية العربية، بكل ما فيها من تعقيدات، ومراعاة
الشركات العالمية تتعامل مع منطقة الشرق الأوسط
الوسط / إفريقيا الذي يتبع عادة للقسم الدولي في هذه
مبيعات هذا القسم، وليس من مجموع مبيعات الشركات

قامت شركة بطرس الدولية للإستشارات
العرفية، أخذة في عين الاعتبار إمكان
التصويرية والالكترونية، وتلك العاملة
ومجلات عربية ومن أهم التطورات التي

Farah typeface (above) and Najm typeface (below) designed by Mourad Boutros.
Ahmed typeface designed by Ahmed Humeid (above), and Yahya typeface designed by Yahya Boutemene (below).
REFERENCES


