Calligraphy marks different cultural periods and eras. In Syriac epigraphy, consulting manuscripts for comparing epigraphic scripts and shapes is not the norm. Yet traced and inscribed texts can share the same scripts. There are cases where manuscripts and inscriptions come from the pen of the same calligrapher. This article compares palaeography in stone inscriptions and manuscripts of three cultural periods in Mesopotamia (Iraq) to highlight their common characteristics.

9TH CENTURY PALEOGRAPHY

Some inscriptions, mainly business documents, uncovered by Iraqi archaeologists in the citadel of Takrit are not dated. Thanks to manuscripts dated to the 9th century, one
can date the said inscriptions to this century. The following inscription, fig. 1, now at the Iraq Museum\textsuperscript{2} shows a script quite similar to the manuscript in fig. 2, BL 17130 fol. 66v:\textsuperscript{3}

During the 8\textsuperscript{th} and 9\textsuperscript{th} centuries the Serto script shows letter shapes reminiscent of Estrangela, as in the case of final olaf and the angular ātē. The sherd from Takrit and the manuscript share several letter shapes: the independent olaf tilts its top rightward while the ligatured one is either a straight line as of the Estrangela or rather the East Syriac type; the ātē is still angular; the gōmal is made of a single stroke just like its East Syriac counterpart; the gōf is a box; the āw is still conservative with its lower hook. The rest of the letters, including the mīm and the semkat are remarkably similar, confirming the date of the Takrit fragment.

THE PALEOGRAPHY OF THE MONGOL PERIOD
(13\textsuperscript{TH}–14\textsuperscript{TH} CENTURIES)

It seems that during the Mongol period a specific Estrangela script was used, as in the inscriptions of the monastery of Mār Behnām and in funerary inscriptions recently uncovered in the town of Karamlēs,\textsuperscript{4} both located in the Plain of Nineveh, not far from Mosul. The new Estrangela script is a revival of the ancient type and is particularly

![Fig. 3. Inscription from the Monastery of Mār Behnām, Iraq](image)

![Fig. 4. Manuscript BL 8729](image)
elegant. Interestingly, the script of Mār Behnām, top calligraphy, looks like that in manuscripts produced by a scribe native of Qaraqōsh, a town near Mār Behnām, while he was living at the Monastery of the Syrians in the Skete desert in Egypt. The pictures in figs. 3 and 4 reflect not only the script known during the Mongol Period, but also the skills of the one scribe who must have produced both of them. The first, fig. 3, comes from the monastery of Mār Behnām; the second, fig. 4, from the manuscript of Sergius son of Bacchus (BL 8729 fol. 65) dated to AD 1230, the approximate date of the inscription:

Common features include: the olaf has a slightly curved horizontal bar, the shoe-like base of the right foot ahead of the foot (as in ु); the ‘ayn slightly slants and ends with a small ball; the pē is markedly angular; the ṣōdē shows pronounced curvature with an acutely angular lower part ending with a short tail; the qōf is a simple box with angular corners; the šīn is slightly curved at the top; and the tāw is trapezoid with an inclined hasta. There are of course other similar letters in both the Skete manuscripts and the Mār Behnām inscriptions, most notably the semkat made of two triangles, which look like “cat’s ears.”

THE PALEOGRAPHY OF THE OTTOMAN PERIOD
(15TH – 19TH CENTURIES)

During the Ottoman Period, especially the 18th and 19th centuries, an enormous amount of manuscripts were produced, written by masterful calligraphers, mainly from the town of Alqosh in the Plain of Nineveh. Both Estrangela and East Syriac scripts were
used. In the case of the former, the shapes were derived from ancient and ‘Mongol’ types and developed by scribes to mark their period. Stone and wood inscriptions that fill the Monastery of Rabban Hormuzd and the Monastery of Our Lady of Seeds also reflect these developed scripts.

The inscription in fig. 5 dates to AD 1804;7 the manuscript in fig. 6 to nine years after (1813).8 Both reflect a widespread Estrangela-type script: an elongated olaf whose right leg ends with a circle; the bēt and the qōf are angular; the semkat in the inscription is angular while in the manuscript one part of it shows this characteristic. All other letters, including the wāw and the tāw are the same.

The Estrangela of the Ottoman period is generally a bit rigid, although it does not lack beauty. Nonetheless, the scribes of the same period sometimes took freedom in their calligraphy, as the inscription in fig. 7 from Mosul, AD 1745,9 and the manuscript in fig. 8 from Ḫakkāri (Eastern Turkey), AD 1753,10 show:

Fig. 7.
Inscription from the Chaldean Church of Al-Ṭahra, Mosul

Fig. 8.
Iraqi Centre of Manuscripts No. 30522
The elongated *olaf* in both cases is striking and calligraphic. All other letters of the East Syriac script found in this church and in contemporary manuscripts are similar, typical during the Ottoman period.

**FINAL NOTES**

In all ages or cultural periods, palaeography is common to both inscribed stones and manuscripts. Perhaps in one case, the same scribe might be seen to have traced his outstanding calligraphy on parchments as well as on stones to be chiselled by stoncutters. He is Sergius son of Bacchus encountered earlier, native of Qaraqôsh and resident of the Monastery of the Easterners in Edessa, and then at the Monastery of the Syrians in Egypt. His masterful Estrangela script found in several manuscripts produced in Edessa and Egypt is very reminiscent of the equally masterful Estrangela decorating the monastery of Mār Behnām, near Mosul.

The study of palaeography must take into consideration both inscribed stones and written manuscripts. Such combinations help in dating undated documents and shed light on historical calligraphies.
NOTES

1 In this article the pictures from Iraq are courtesy of the Iraqi Department of Antiquities and Heritage and the Iraqi Centre of Manuscripts, and the pictures from Hatch, Dated Syriac Manuscripts, are courtesy of Gorgias Press.
3 W. H. Hatch, Dated Syriac Manuscripts (Boston 1946), Plate CVIII.
4 Harrak, Syriac and Garshuni Inscriptions of Iraq, vol. 2, plate 80: AC.01.04, AC.01.05 and AC.01.06.
6 W. H. Hatch, Dated Syriac Manuscripts, Plate XCI.
7 Harrak, Syriac and Garshuni Inscriptions of Iraq, vol. 2, plate 226: AP.01.39, where the picture is entirely placed.
9 Harrak, Syriac and Garshuni Inscriptions of Iraq, AA.02.01.
10 On the manuscript see Harrak, Catalogue of Syriac and Garshuni Manuscripts, p. 57-60.