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Calligraphic Forms in Contemporary Typographic Design

Özden Pektaş Turgut*

*Assistant Professor, Gazi University Faculty of Fine Arts VCD Dept,
Tunus Cad. No:35 Kavaklıdere, Ankara 06680, Turkey*

Abstract

As we define the basic function of writing as transmission of thought and knowledge by the help of signs, typography is one step beyond this definition, in another meaning it is “arts/design making by writing” dimension. Previously, typography was used to define print technique made with metal letters which is developed by Gutenberg has developed in meaning at our times; it is qualified as an expertise field which takes artistic-graphical features of writing and punctuation as the main subject. Typography as a design element carries the idea of transferring knowledge and message in an understandable form and also being a style, a visual language, a different image idea. Letter as the most basic cornerstones of typography has abstracted basic abc structure by transforming from pictographic writing in the historical process. The basic element of the letter is strike and beatings and today’s typographic characters have been formed at the end of a long evolution starting from handwriting. In this process, calligraphy as an important field which establishes the basic of typographic characters, creation of writing styles is defined as nice writing(calligraphy) arts. Calligraphic arrangements are classified according to several cultures taking place under 3 main titles as East, West and Islamic Calligraphy. Calligraphy with its variety presented in material used in application, with its liveliness and originality of arrangement has been a popular design element in many graphical products.

Keywords: Typography, Calligraphy, Graphic Design, Typographic Design

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1. Writing and Typography

Human beings move around with the instinct of understanding the events taking place around him, to explain the experiences he has lived to other individuals and to exchange feeling, ideas and knowledge. Human beings who benefit nominally from visual and audible senses expressed their first writing idea with primitive pictures and lines he has drawn on the walls of inns in the process qualified as communication. Writing defined as “all

* Corresponding name: Özden Pektaş Turgut. Tel.: +90 312 4257675 / 125
E-mail address: ozdenpektas@gmail.com

signs and figures formed by drawing, digging on any material to transfer feelings and ideas to others” (Usly, 1989, p.5) has given opportunity to keep information in history and transferring it to other generations.

Writing is an expression style formed of significant signs and sign systems which individuals applied for explaining feelings, ideas and wishes except speaking. Writing is a basic element for all mass medium. Invention of writing is an important event that connects cultures, countries and ages that have creative minds. Writing is a language system formed of symbols representing a language. Typography constitutes printed or numerical (digital) form and a different meaning loaded form of writing. A serial structure is available between the spoken language, writing and typography. Designer Adrian Frutiger defines writing as “knowledge storage instrument”. In addition to keeping a told knowledge for later usages, he mentions that it forms a stylistic instrument to make the enounced ones readable. According to Frutiger, it means that typography is an effective experience and knowledge storage always related to the statement. If we define the basic function of writing as the transfer of ideas and knowledge with the help of signs; typography is a step beyond this definition, it is a dimension of “arts/design making with writing” in another meaning (Uçar, 2004, p.106). Previously, typography that is used to define printing technique made with metal letters developed by Gutenberg is being qualified as an expertise field taking the artistic-graphical features of writing and punctuation has widened in meaning at our times. Typography in many sources is being stated as an instrument of communication and is defined as “a transmission instrument of all ideas and knowledge to human beings with a visual style” (Carter, 1993, p.1). According to Namık Kemal Sarıkavak, typography is “ a design language formed by elements related to letters and literary, visual communication, both functional and aesthetical organization of all these elements” (Sarıkavak, 2004,p.11).

Typography serves the building of a communication channel beyond the statement by the help of styles and shapes of writing characters and giving a visual shape to a written idea. Typography is one of the effective elements giving feeling and individuality to the typographic design. Typographic message is visual, auditory and oral. Typographic elements can be watched, perceived visually, heard and interpreted audibly while they are being read and interpreted orally. Typography with this multilateral structure is a dynamic communication instrument. (Becer, 1997 p.184). In this context, selection of writing character, letter sizes, planning of spaces and in addition to these from its location on the surface it has been presented to the arrangement of functional system, have been the problems of typographic communication. It is important to arrange such typographic elements as font, shape, color, space on the media in which it will be exhibited to the receiver as a message in a correct and effective way. The famous American typographic expert Beatrice Worde emphasizes the role of typography both as an arts and communication instrument with these words “well typography looks like a well, crystal wine glass, it is transparent and permeable like a water glass which can succeed in presenting the beauty in itself rather than hiding it, a well graphic design and typography should help communication between people with its understandability and creativity” (Pipes, 1992, p. 30).

As a result, typography is a technique of selection of kind and magnitude of all writings including designed letters, numbers and punctuation signs to transfer oral messages to the audience, determination of line or line length in the texts formed with this writings, organization and design of spaces between line, letter and words. Shaping of visual structure of writings taking place in a design product or page design and organization of these writings are also the subject of typography. According to Evans-Thomas “graphic design is organization of visual and typographic elements in the form of creating an effective communication.”(Evans & Thomas, 2004, p.4).

2. Calligraphy in Typographic Design

Calligraphy word comes from Greek word “calligraph as, kallos; beauty, graphos; writing, writer, written” (Encyclopedia of the Arts, p.130). Generally, although it has been named as “nice writing, nice hand writing”, several definitions are being made in the literature. C. Esad Arseven defines calligraphy as “the art of nice writing and writings which calligraphy has written in an aesthetic way” in his work Arts Encyclopedia (Arseven, 1997, p.924) Although *hüsn-ü hat* and calligraphy have common aims, *hüsn-ü hat* has several types in itself in the frame of techniques and application. Calligraphy is the common name of nice writing with hand and nice writing arts in other alphabets besides Arabic alphabet. Because of this reason, it carries a global term as a generalization. Eczacıbaşı Arts Encyclopedia mentions calligraphy term as; Elegant and aesthetic writing arts with a pencil or a brush on a paper or ideographic equipment by arranging the spaces between the letters according to significant aesthetic and design rules. It is called as *hüsn-ü hat* in Islamic arts. Whereas writing serves for a functional aim, it is also related with stylistic development of other arts branches. Hieroglyph or iconographic writing (Old Egypt, pre-Colombus America), stylistic or ideographic writing (China, Japanese. Korea) and alphabetical writing (Islamic and West) have emerged parallel to these developments.” (Eczacıbaşı Arts Encyclopedia, 1997).

Calligraphy which can be defined as nice writing arts with a pencil, brush or special equipment on paper or similar materials by arranging the spaces between the letters according to significant aesthetic and design rules is an important part of visual arts. Calligraphy carries aesthetical values on itself peculiar to different geography, language and cultures with China writing in Far East cultures, Arabic writing in Middle-east in Islamic cultures and Latin in West culture (Figure 1).



Fig. 1: Images related to calligraphic arrangements of different cultures

Development phase of calligraphy is directly related to the evolution of writing on which it has been grounded. In this context, calligraphy is visual interpretation style which the artist presents with aesthetic concerns by developing from writing. While the writing carries a beneficial aim by emerging from needs, aesthetic value concern of calligraphy and, carrying stylistic and symbolic meanings made it familiar with other arts branches. When the starting point is writing, although the development phase can be perceived same, it caused some changes in the process of development on the aims of emergence of writing and calligraphy. In addition to this, the rules of them are generally the same. While writing is a second system, which determines the system called as language with significant signs, that people use to communicate with each other; aesthetic values in calligraphy gain an artistic structure for it. According to EminYarar, “the relationship of calligraphy with arts has brought it to an effective arts position as it has been in China in which it does not fall behind drawing arts. This effect is a feature which can be seen in pictographic or iconographic writing in Old Egypt and Pre-Colombian America, ideographic or synthesizer writing in China and Japanese or alphabetical writing in Cufi, Carolingian, Gothic’s and Renaissance.” (Yarar, 1987, p.7). Arabic calligraphy and Far East calligraphy is the

field that western painters have applied searching for discrepancy in modern arts trends in 20th century. Western artists have realized that Arabic calligraphy has been a rare source in the formation of abstract shapes of flexible movements and aesthetic structure of Arabic calligraphy, oriented to symbolization with geometrical structures in Far East calligraphy.

It is possible to separate calligraphy as East and West calligraphy if we take processes and cultural differences that writing has lived during having a calligraphic formation. Roma forms, rustic and cursive writings, usage of gothic writing characters and together with hand writings since the invention of printing machine in the development process of west calligraphy have an important place. Calligraphic weighted and gothic writing characters have been used in printed works by reaching large mass with several printed books after the invention of printing machine. First books of “Johannes Gutenberg, Johannes Fust and Peter Schoffer are formed of writings in Gothic forms (Lawther, 1991, p.15). In the calligraphic designs which have entered standstill period with the invention of printing machine, mainly decorative aimed embroidering, adornments have been oriented; the effect of calligraphy has strengthened at the beginning of 19th century in which the interest of hand arts has increased with the perceivment of writing as an arts again.

It will be appropriate to separate east calligraphy as Far East and Middle East calligraphy. Because it is a matter of general distinction between calligraphy seen in Japan and Korean writings, Chinese writing in Far East and calligraphy shaped in Arabic writing in Middle East . Cultural and geographical distinctions bring individual structural differences in East calligraphy. Especially calligraphy changing form as *-hat, hüsn-ü hat-* and shows itself as an arts with the effect of Islam in Middle East has serious distinctions with the different artistic applications in Chinese, Japanese and Korean cultures. Different examples can be seen in Middle East calligraphy which is shaped with Arabic writing and goes beyond Islamic arts by shaping itself. *Hüsn-ü hat* has developed as a lively arts branch in which feelings and thoughts are explained by the way of lines transforming into writing in Islam countries where lively portrayal is prohibited (Çopur, 1996, p. 34).

In Japanese and Korean writings derived from Chinese writing, the biggest reason of shaping calligraphy as having masterful and aesthetic values is the domination of lively and free structure formed with brush strikes. In China “every nominee entering governmental exams should write in artistic forms on special papers with brush and black ink where calligraphy as arts had much value. By the help of these writings knowledge, character and culture of the individual could be understood”. (Hartmann, 1988, p.8). Today in Japan; calligraphy competitions are being organized every year and participants from every age and career are competing for the exhibition of their products. Whereas the development of calligraphy in Europe has been in geometrical and intuitive style, it is generally in intuitive style in East and Far East.

Graphics design starts with a problem and forms an effective, permanent and interesting solution production. Graphics present design, ideas, concepts, texts and visuals by taking them and undergoing from print, electronics and other processes in an impressive way In the name of easing communication process, it helps understanding and taking of message by the target audience while providing order and structure for the content. (Ambrose and Harris, 2012, p.10). It is a visual communication in general meaning. It is formed of many fields such as graphics design, package design, environmental graphics, informative graphics, and mobile graphics. (Öztuna, 2007, p.11) One of the most important tools to transfer the feelings and ideas in this large field is typography. Daily typographic characters have been formed at the end of a long evolution starting from hand writings. Writing instruments such as brush, reed and cutter have directly affected letter styles (Becer, 1997 p. 176.). In parallel with this, correct selection and usage of this equipment forming the basic of calligraphic arrangement is an important factor like ability which affects the quality of designs. “Except ready equipment, calligraphy can form new equipment according to the interest and tendency of the artist itself” (Lynskey, 1988, p.11).

Calligraphy can be used in many different fields such as painting, architecture, graphics design, and textile design with the contributions of developing technology. The origins of many writings we have been using in graphics design are based on hand writing and calligraphic forms. While typography expert Femard Baudin defends existence of visualism and permanence at the origin of writing, it defines it as “letter is one of the cornerstones of printed texts and letter design is such an ability that the difference of one character from the other can be understood with microscopic details.” (Pipes, 1992, p.29) In this context, many writing characters such as Palatino, Gill Sans which are being used at our times and have been designed by important calligraphy artists in the past are the products of these talented hands.

Baudin defines typography as “technology transferring by increasing the heritage of calligraphy” (Baudin,1989, p.18). The effect of typographic weighted design products by means of simplicity, aesthetics, and intensity according to the ones including visual images is undiscussable. Today, calligraphic arrangements designed by hand, processing them in computer or/and usage of these with writing characters takes too much attention. Calligraphy combined with computer technology can be basis for the designs with effective visualism. In many graphics design products, design with preferred writing characters in calligraphic form, dynamic and lively structure, not the mechanic ones, of writing puts forward typography in an effective way.

Calligraphy which is qualified as “old fashion” and generally accepted as not agreeable style with the new design styles, takes the attention of western world active usage of Arabic calligraphy in many contemporary typographic arrangements by the Iranian designers. Nowadays as the technology surrounds all around us, human beings who miss arts/design products created or designed by hand are oriented to use two of these environments together. Usage of calligraphy in writing characters designed with brush effect which is the main equipment of Far East calligraphy, typographic posters, package designs, logo designs, digital designs and many other graphical products are the result of this situation. (Figure 2).



Fig. 2: The views of usage of calligraphy in graphical design products

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