



# PHILATELI-GRAPHICS

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## Calligraphy in Philately: Part 1

*Kathy Bell, retired Professor of Art History, Art Education, and Professional Calligrapher*

The word calligraphy derives from the Greek words kalos plus grafos meaning beautiful writing. Calligraphy is created using a specially shaped pen that has a flat, wide tip. Held at a constant slant, when the pen is moved sideways it makes a thin line. When it's moved in a perpendicular direction, it produces a thick line. That is, as the calligrapher changes the direction of movement, the line thickness varies from the thinnest to the thickest possible. Initial letters, in contrast to textual calligraphy, are drawn with a pointed pen and painted in.

When compiling my personal calligraphic stamp collection I had to make choices. Austria, for example, uses a beautiful blackletter typeface for the country name on stamps, but I decided I wanted unique specimens of calligraphy. Several European countries have shown the decorated initial letters found in their ancient historical documents. That was closer, but not quite what I wanted for my collection. I desired the actual hand-written material that originally followed the initial letter. Over several years I found interesting specimens, particularly enjoying research of the original document and the purpose for which it was written. The following documents and coordinating stamps are arranged according to the age of the original document.

EBERS PAPYRUS, 1550 BCE; GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC, SCOTT #2207, 1981

The Ebers Papyrus, the oldest example examined in this article (Fig.1), was written in Hieratic script in 1550 BCE by Egyptian scribes. Evidence of amazing ancient Egyptian medical knowledge, the Ebers

Papyrus contains descriptions of simple surgeries, a sizeable pharmacology, and instructions for the setting of broken bones. Egyptian medicine, both incredibly sophisticated

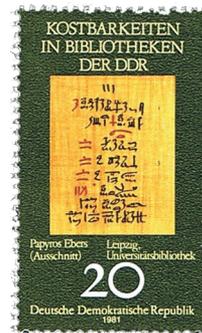


Fig. 1, Sc 2207

and superstitious, abounds with magical incantations and “foul applications” to drive out disease-causing demons.

The Ebers Papyrus was only decipherable after the Rosetta Stone revealed the interpretation of Egyptian Hieroglyphs. Interpretation was still difficult because some content was rarely seen medical terminology.

The Papyrus is in the form of a 110 page scroll (scrolls were made by sewing together pages of papyrus) about 20 meters in length. Hieratic symbols, written horizontally from right to left in parallel rows, were derived from Hieroglyphs somewhat abstracted from the original pictographs. Though Hieroglyphs were generally carved in stone and painted, Hieratic was usually written in ink with a reed brush on papyrus. Hieratic script, which existed parallel to Hieroglyphic writing, was originally useful *cont. on page 4*

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*cont. from page 1* for financial and business records or, as in this case, instructional texts, and later was used for religious purposes.

The Ebers Papyrus was purchased in Thebes by George Ebers in 1873. Ebers was professor of Egyptology at the University of Leipzig, where the papyrus is housed in the library.

HUAI-SU, TANG DYNASTY,  
 772 BCE; REPUBLIC OF CHINA,  
 SCOTT #2100, 1978

In China, calligraphy has long been accorded a reputation equal to, and at times superior to, painting. The unlikely looking writing on Sc 2100 (Fig. 2) is an example of wild style Chinese cursive from the Tang



Fig. 2, Sc 2100.

Dynasty (907-618 BCE). Wild style cursive involves joining and rapidly writing characters that were normally written separately. The line traces the writer's movements from one stroke to the next, connecting them.

Calligrapher Huai-Su lived in the late 8th century, 799-737 BCE. By his early 30's he was already being recognized as one of the greatest writers of cursive characters in the Tang Dynasty. His style was

described as "galloping and surging," and "unrestrained," yet it retains enough of the essential form of the character to be readable. Wild style was so unique it established a new appreciation of the individuality of the artist.

The writing on Scott 2100 (Fig. 2) was part of Huai-Su's autobiography, a handscroll over 24 feet long. This autobiography contains 126 vertical lines of characters and is unique among scrolls of the Tang Dynasty because of its size and number of characters. There were originally three scrolls in the collection of the National Palace Museum, but this is the only survivor. It dates during the twelfth year of the Dali era, about 777 BCE in the western calendar, when the scribe was around 40.

THE ALEPPO CODEX, 930 CE;  
 ISRAEL, SCOTT #1420, 2000

There can hardly be a more dramatic story woven around one hand-written book than the story of the Aleppo Codex, the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible. The Codex (book with pages sewn on one side) was written



Fig. 3, Sc 1420.

in 930 CE by Slomo ben Buyda in the city of Tiberias (Fig. 3).

The writing was done with a quill pen on parchment or vellum. Since Hebrew is written from right to left, but the individual letters are written from left to right, the scribe has to visualize the next letter to place it in correct relation to the preceding one. The pen is held in a vertical position so all horizontal lines are thicker than the vertical ones. Letters are spaced as close together as possible and suspended from a horizontal line at the top.

Aaron ben Asher carefully proofread and corrected the text of the Aleppo Codex and added vowel points below the letters. Hebrew was often written with only consonants, but as the language had fallen out of daily use, the addition of vowel points was necessary to indicate pronunciation. Once synagogues introduced the singing of the Torah (the books of Moses), cantillation marks were added to aid the Rabbis in singing the text. The original Codex had 380 sheets of parchment of which 295 still exist.

After about 100 years, the book was moved from Tiberias to Jerusalem; then, under attack by the Crusaders, it was sent to Cairo, Egypt. During the 14th century, it was moved to Aleppo (which has been part of Syria since 1920) where there was a large Jewish community. Its text is seen as the most accurate Bible text, almost identical to the wording preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were written about 1,000 years earlier. The Codex was in demand for use in correcting other manuscripts, but the Aleppo community guarded it so tightly it was almost impossible for scholars to access it, as it lay in a vault under the Aleppo Synagogue.

When the United Nations recognized the State of Israel on November 29, 1947, riots broke out in Aleppo

and the synagogue was burned. For years, it was assumed that the Crown, as the Codex is called, had burned along with the synagogue. The Codex's discovery and retrieval makes a good detective story as written in 2012 by Matti Friedman in *The Aleppo Codex: A True Story of Obsession, Faith, and Pursuit of an Ancient Bible*. The Codex now resides in the Museum of the Book as part of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

ILLUMINATED CODEX, CONSTITUTIONES JACOBI II REGIS MAJORICUM, 14TH CENTURY; SPAIN, SCOTT #2528, 1987

The Constitutiones Jacobi II Regis Majoricum is a codex outlining the laws and privileges of citizens of Majorca during its brief period as an independent kingdom in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. It has been preserved in the Albert I Royal Library in Brussels. Part of its content describes the postal system of Majorca.

In form, calligraphy in the Constitutiones is very typical of a late gothic manuscript, featuring illuminated initials that contain a miniature (small illustration) and gold leaf. The codex is authored in Latin, and the calligraphy is in blackletter style. Blackletter was so named due to its compactness in space between both letters and lines. This approach to layout creates a very dense, black rectangle on the page, hence the name blackletter.



Fig. 4, Sc 2528.

In the first line of Sc 2528 (Fig. 4) are some rubricated words (written in red or blue as a means of emphasizing certain words).

Extra decoration, such as the spirals seen at the top and bottom of the square containing the initial letter, usually occupy the top, left and bottom margins of the page. The spirals shown, which have been cut off, probably occupied most of the left margin.

BANNER OF ST. FRIDOLEIN, 1388; SWITZERLAND, SCOTT #819, 1988

A Swiss stamp, Sc 819 (Fig. 5), commemorates the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Näfels (1388) in which 500 men of the Canton of Glarus, Switzerland defeated a large troop of Austrians. The Glarus



Fig. 5, Sc 819.

mountain men may not have been superior soldiers, but they knew the mountains. Summoned by the banner of Fridolin, they retreated to the hills and rolled large boulders down on their attackers. After the victory, several rural areas united to form the Confederacy of Glarus. Their coat of arms displays St. Fridolin in his priestly robe backed by a red ground, as seen on the stamp.

Fridolin was an Irish monk/missionary to Säkingen on the Rhine river in the 11th century. His appearance on the Coat of Arms of Glarus is due to an early convert, Urso. Urso was a wealthy landowner who, in gratitude to Fridolin, willed him large land holdings that comprise the modern Canton of Glarus. Urso's brother was unhappy over the will and challenged Fridolin in court. Fridolin produced the deed Urso had given him before his death, which settled the lawsuit.

On the stamp, a manuscript backs St. Fridolin and his red banner. This manuscript is written in a freehand version of medieval *bâtarde* script, French for *bastarda*, composed of blackletter with added cursive connections and curved flourishes. According to a translation of the few words that can be seen, it seems to commemorate the battle.

FLATEYJARBÓK, 1374-94; ICELAND, SCOTT #418, 1970

The Færeyinga Saga, written shortly after 1200, was a history of how the Faroe Islands were converted to Christianity. The original manuscript has been lost, but parts of it were copied in Flateyjarbók (Flatey or Flat Island Book), a medieval manuscript originally written in Old Icelandic. The Flateyjarbók (spelled phonetically since the original spelling has been lost) was compiled in 1387-94 on Flatey Island, off the west coast of Iceland. It is extremely rare to know the name of a scribe of this time period, yet we know Jon Þórðarson was the scribe, and the illuminator was Magnús Prestr Thorhallsson.



Fig. 6, Sc 418.

This medieval manuscript was joined to the Saga of St. Olaf, possibly by Carl Christian Rafu (1795-1864), to make up the complete book we have today. Flateyjarbók was owned by Jon Finnsson, who lived on Flatey Island. *cont. on page 6*

*cont. from page 5* Attempts to purchase the ancient book for a national archive were refused by Finnsson who valued it as an heirloom, despite the offer of a large tract of land. By 1651, King Frederick of Norway required all ancient books be donated to the state, either as a gift or for payment. Finnsson surrendered his precious heirloom in 1656. Flateyjarbók was added to the Royal Library in Copenhagen and remained outside of its home for three centuries before being returned to Iceland in 1971 as a national treasure.

The text is written in a casual blackletter. Compared to the Constitutiones Jacobi II codex, it is clearly less controlled and consistent. The page represented on the stamp also gives us a good look at illumination extending down the left margin of the text.

HENRY IV & THE EDICT OF NANTES, 1598;  
 FRANCE, SCOTT #1261, 1969

The French Wars of Religion (1562-1598) was a period of violent fighting between Catholics and Protestants (Huguenots). King Henry IV of France had been raised as a Protestant. He became Henry III, King of Navarre (the small kingdom in the Pyrenees where he was born), where he supported the Huguenot cause. He converted to the Catholic Church in order to marry Margaret of Valois, the daughter of Catherine de Medici in



Fig. 7, Sc 1261.

1572, but reverted to Protestantism four years later. He became King of France in 1589. On April 13, 1598 he put a temporary end to the Wars of Religion with the Edict of Nantes. The Edict was a cautious step toward religious tolerance granting religious freedom to the Huguenots while reaffirming Catholicism as the established religion of France. The Edict returned the country to the religious structure in place before his reign.

The only part of the Edict featured on Sc 1261 (Fig. 7) large enough to be read, even with a magnifying glass, is the introductory line. It says, “Henry par la grace de Dieu Roy de France et de Navarre” (Henry by the grace of God, King of France and Navarre). This largest writing is a blend of medieval elements, such as the ‘r’ that is only half written and leans

on the preceding letter and the use of a ‘u’ in place of the ‘v’ in Navarre. The capital letters are highly ornamented with elaborate flourishes, and the introductory letters are taller than those in the rest of the document. The writings on the right side of the stamp are signatures similarly flourished. The luxurious amount of space within and between lines however, is more typical of Humanist writing used in renaissance Italy than of medieval writing.

FURTH DRAGON LANCING FESTIVAL, 1590;  
 GERMANY, SCOTT #2134, 2001

The origin of the Drachenstich Furth im Wald, Slaying of the Dragon, was a violent battle between the armies of Bohemia and Germany. The Bohemian attack was vengeance for the burning of their reformer, Jan Hus (Anglicized to Jon Huss), at the stake. Hus was executed by the Catholic Church to quell reformers. A hundred years later, Martin Luther would complete



Fig. 8, Sc 2134.

the reforms Hus had begun. The legend, distantly related to the Bohemian rebellion, was about a dragon awakening from an ancient curse. The evils, violence and bloodletting inspire the evil power of the dragon and loose a formidable threat to the Castle of Furth and its lands. The only way of stopping the dragon was for a fearless knight to kill it. The knight Udo was determined to battle the dragon until he was captured in a mortal conspiracy. The only other hope was for a young lady of the Castle of Furth to sacrifice herself for the people.

For over 500 years, the town of Furth im Wald has celebrated the Slaying of the Dragon festival, which takes place in August. In 2000 however, the ancient pageant took on a high-tech format. More than 20 companies, including Hollywood’s Magicon, took part in building a mechanical dragon designed by Sikander Goldaus. The mechanical, fire-breathing dragon created a celebration worthy of the turn of the millennium. The dragon is accompanied by fireworks, beautiful maidens, and sword-wielding horsemen.

The design of Sc 2134 (Fig. 8) takes the traditional Fraktur blackletter form of 'F' (Furth) and alters it to portray the fire-breathing dragon facing a sword.

The examples included in this article bring us from ancient Egypt up to the renaissance. The second half of the story will take us from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup>.

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**Origami:**  
**One, two, three, four, hat**  
**(made) of, hat (made) of.**  
**One, two, three, four, hat**  
**(made) of paper.**

*Theo Huisman, Netherlands*  
*Translated by Amanda L. Morgenstern*

**L**ong before I heard of origami, I had already dealt with the art of paper folding. Many of us, like me, spent their

childhood folding paper planes (Fig. 1), boats (Fig. 2) and paper hats, or walking with paper windmills.

In the 20th century we found paper windmills at the fair (Fig. 3). In some countries like Chile, the windmills are a part of their national, cultural heritage. Those mills we all remember, interestingly, can be found in a painting by Pieter Brueghel in 1560 (Fig. 4-5). Only recently,

do all these 'folded fabrics' fall equally under the heading "origami," like the more traditional cranes, frogs, flowers, angels and postmen (Fig. 6).

As we know, paper is a Chinese invention. Early examples of paper folding are by monks (the Buddhist Doncho and Hosō, the Korean Ranjin.)



Fig. 1, France, 2010, Sc. 3888.

Fig. 2, Greece 2011, Sc. 2492.



Fig. 3, Venezuela 1967, Sc. C973.



Fig. 4, Children's Games by Pieter Brueghel, which features over 200 children playing a variety of 80+ games.

Fig. 5, Enlargement of the section featuring paper windmills.



Fig. 6, Solomon Islands 1974, Sc. 272.

The invention of paper came to Japan in 610, which developed its own way of making paper and paper folding (creases, folds, plaits). The oldest references to this concern gift wrappers (noshi 熨斗), a kind of ceremonial origami fold entirely distinct from "origami-tsuki." They are not certificates, but are attached to gifts to express "good wishes." Noshi consists of white paper folded with a strip of dried abalone or meat, considered a token of good fortune) and envelopes. For centuries, the folding instructions were transmitted orally. *cont. on page 8*