



Questioned Documents - 2017

J18 The Development of the Copybook System in the West Bank/Palestine

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the copybook systems developed and used in Palestine and the West Bank since the inception of handwriting instruction in that state.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community, and in particular the Forensic Document Examiners (FDE) community, by providing insight into the systems of handwriting instruction taught in Palestine and the West Bank.

Arabic ranks as the fifth most-widely spoken language in the world in terms of native speakers; the top five are Chinese, Spanish, English, Hindi, and Arabic. In 1973, Arabic was recognized by the United Nations as an official language alongside Chinese, English, French, Spanish, and Russian.

Arabic is the native tongue of approximately 300 million people, and is the national and official language of some 22 Arab states. Arabic is also spoken and written by non-Arab Muslims around the world as Islam's Holy Book, the Qur'an, is written in this language.

As with other written languages, styles of the written system were documented in order to simplify handwriting instruction for students in the population. The historical importance in forensic document examination of the copybook system is the classification and depiction of what are known as class characteristics. Class characteristics pertain to those features of a writing that are common to a group of individuals; traditionally, this refers to a system of handwriting taught in a school environment and quite typically was created for use in a specific country, nation, or population.

Considering the widespread range of Arabic as a script, it is expected that there are many different copybook systems for the many different Arabic countries and places where Arabic is used in classroom instruction. These different copybook systems will affect the way the Arabic scripts appear, and as a result, there is a possibility to predict the origin of the writer, or at least where the writer's primary education was received, from some of their handwriting characteristics.

In order to identify the class characteristics of the Arabic handwriting taught in Palestinian schools, the copybook systems used over the past 50-60 years were documented for this study. It was found that over three distinct time intervals between 1952 and 2015, three different copybook systems can be recognized. These styles are identified as Rika, Naskh, and a mix of these two.

Since 2014, the Palestinian Authority, in conjunction with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, has been developing forensic science capacity, and with respect to this research, forensic document examination capability. With this new forensic capability, and as a modern state with a set history of widespread handwriting instruction, there is an opportunity to document the entirety of the copybook systems used in a region. This original research was undertaken to explore and publish as a reference tool for forensic document examiners the copybook systems that have been used in the West Bank and what is known as Palestine, since the beginning of the modern school system that incorporated handwriting instruction for students.

Forensic Document Examination, Arabic Handwriting, Copybook

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