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J20 Mixed-Script Signatures: A Modern Paradigm for an Age-Old Identifier

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better appreciate a yet-undocumented classification of signatures.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community, and in particular the Forensic Document Examiners (FDE) community, by providing information on an undocumented form of signature that may be encountered in casework, especially with Arabic script writers.

Handwriting has been around since the beginning of civilization and the “signature” or the act of signing a document, has long been accepted by nearly every culture as a form of personal identifier, often signifying one’s recognition and agreement on the contents and implications of written words. A naturally developed signature represents the most often reproduced and habitual act of writing, and as such have been studied since the very beginnings of the field of questioned document examination. There is much research, both published and anecdotal, with this objective.

Various signature forms have been identified in the literature such as text-based, stylized and mixed. Discussed here, is a form of signature found in the West Bank and Palestinian Territories that has not been, according to this research, encountered elsewhere.

This paper introduces a new classification or form of the signature, the mixed-script or compound signature. Specifically, this paper will show one such version of the mixed-script signature: the compound Arabic/Latin script which consists of a signature written partially in both the Arabic and English languages (Latin script).

Based on anecdotal observation that the compound signature has not been reported upon elsewhere, this research was undertaken in order to establish how widespread this form of signature is in the West Bank. Moreover, possible reasons for adopting this form of signature are explored: to make the signature more complex and difficult to simulate or forge; to express both Arabic and English/Western cultures in a signature; to show dealings with Western/foreigners for work purposes; as an expression of blended cultures; and, finally for purely aesthetic reasons.

This preliminary study comprised a sample size of 20 writers. Each writer was asked to provide 8 exemplars of their signature using 3 types of writing instrument. Furthermore the exemplars were collected on unlined paper, with ruled paper, and using a constrained space or box on the page.

After collecting the samples they were separated for analysis based on the language with which the writer began their signature. Then, the general aspects and particular characteristics of each signature, such as the layout, regularity/rhythm, slope, and direction of stroke were observed. Internal proportions of the signatures such as the relative heights and sizes of characters of both the Latin-script and Arabic portions of the signature were noted. Certain tendencies were recorded. Specifically, it was noted that for most writers that employed the compound signature the writer wrote one name in one script with the second name in the other script, that the finishing stroke of one script became the initial stroke of the second script, that there were slope differences for the different portions of the signature, that the upper/lower case conventions of Latin-script were not adhered to, and that these signatures appeared embellished and flourished.



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This research is presented to show this unusual form of signature. Further research will build upon the small sample size shown here to establish the frequency or prevalence for the mixed-script or compound signature use in the West Bank/Palestine and in other Arabic countries.

Signature, Arabic Script, Latin Script