

Abstract

This thesis investigates the evolution of Arabic type-making under the influence of changing technologies. Its historical scope is limited by two events which marked significant turning points in technological development: in 1908 the first adaptation of Arabic to mechanical typesetting equipment heralded the beginning of machine-aided composition; and in 1993 the wide-spread adoption of the Unicode encoding standard marked the end of equipment (platform) dependency for type.

Drawing on original archival research, this study mainly analyses primary sources to establish the principal factors that influenced decision making in the design process. It thus aims to contribute to the closing of substantial gaps in existing literature, often marked by fragmentary, unsubstantiated or erroneous information. The thesis outlines the characteristics of changing manufacturing processes and composition equipment, highlighting the impact that technical constraints of machinery conceived for the Latin script had on Arabic type. Moreover, the relative importance of technological constraints and economic pressure, as well as cultural and artistic considerations, are critically assessed through select case studies, chosen for their significance and influence on type-making. The study also briefly discusses the collaboration of Western companies with their customers and representatives in the Arabic script world, and in passing it contextualises typographic developments in the larger socio-economic settings of the region.

In conclusion, historically influential trends and themes developed throughout the thesis are summarised in a concise discussion of the changing approaches to Arabic type-making. Additionally, these approaches are evaluated in order to delineate characteristics of best practice for current practitioners and students. The thesis is intended to be informative for type, printing and design historians, and scholars from a range of related disciplines.