

Rethinking Calligraphy: Anachronisms And Semantic Misalignments in Western Writing Traditions

Kaligrafi Terimini Yeniden Düşünmek: Batı Yazı Geleneğinde Anakronik Yaklaşımlar ve Anlam Kaymaları

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to re-examine the word calligraphy by its definitions and perceptions within the Western writing tradition. Conventionally translated as “the art of beautiful handwriting,” this definition causes an anachronistic framework that does not align with the functional role of writing in Western manuscript culture. From late antiquity through the pre-Gutenberg era, calligraphy was primarily executed by scribes as a craft of recording, copying, and transmitting texts for religious, scholarly, and administrative purposes rather than as a form of artistic expression. The term calligraphy itself did not yet exist, nor did the modern concept of art, making the retroactive application of “art of beautiful writing” historically inaccurate. Moreover, the semantic confusion arises from the Western use of calligraphy being conflated with Chinese shufa (the art and the discipline of writing), Japanese shodo (art of writing, a way of writing), and Islamic khatt (line, streak, stripe, track, path, road), which vary in distinct cultural, philosophical, and spiritual values. The revival movements of the twentieth century and contemporary experimental practices have transformed calligraphy into a personal expression and a refined aesthetic. Thus, through writing-like gestures, abstraction, and visual imagery, calligraphy has evolved into an interdisciplinary and performative discipline. This situation causes the terminological confusion to be based on erroneous evaluations made in the historical context. Within this context, this paper argues that such conceptual overlaps and linguistic projections result in misnomers that obscure the specific historical and functional dimensions of Western writing. Through documentary research based on dictionaries, critical texts, encyclopedias, manuals, and scholarly analyses, this study suggests a more apparent terminological distinction and a historically grounded re-evaluation of what constitutes “calligraphy” within the Western canon.

Keywords: Calligraphy, art, beauty, tradition, misnomer, anachronism

Öz

Bu çalışma, kaligrafi kelimesini Batı yazı geleneği içindeki tanımları ve algıları üzerinden yeniden bir inceleme sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Geleneksel bağlamda “güzel yazı yazma sanatı” olarak çevrilen kaligrafi teriminin, Batı’daki el yazması kültüründe yazının işlevsel rolüyle örtüşmeyen anakronik bir çerçeve yarattığı söylenebilir. Geç Antik Çağ’dan Gutenberg öncesi döneme kadar kaligrafi, esas olarak dinî, bilimsel ve idari amaçlarla metinleri kaydetme, kopyalama ve aktarma zanaatını icra eden yazıcılar/kâtipler tarafından uygulanmaktayken, sanatsal bir ifade biçimi olarak görülmemektedir. Kaligrafi teriminin kendisi de henüz ortaya çıkmamış, modern anlamıyla sanat kavramının da henüz mevcut olmadığı bilinmektedir. Dolayısıyla bu dönemde icra edilen çalışmalara geriye dönük olarak “güzel yazı sanatı” demek tarihsel açıdan doğru olmayacaktır. Ayrıca Batı’daki kaligrafi kullanımının, Çin shufa (yazı yazma sanatı ve disiplini), Japon shodo (yazı sanatı) ve İslam hat (çizgi, yol) geleneğiyle eş tutulması, farklı kültürel, felsefi ve ruhani değerlere sahip bu gelenekler arasında anlamsal bir karmaşaya yol açmaktadır. Yirminci yüzyılda kaligrafide eski yazı stilleri üzerinden referanslarla canlanma hareketleri ve güncel deneysel uygulamalar, kaligrafiyi kişisel ifadenin ve estetik inceliğin bir alanına dönüştürür. Böylece yazıya benzer jestler, soyutlama ve görsel imgeler yoluyla kaligrafi, disiplinlerarası ve performatif bir pratiğe evrilir. Bu durum terminolojik karmaşanın tarihsel bağlamda yapılan hatalı değerlendirmeler üzerine kurulmasına neden olur. Bu bağlamda çalışma, söz konusu kavramsal örtüşmelerin ve dilsel yansımaların, Batı yazı geleneğinin tarihsel ve işlevsel boyutlarını gölgeleyen yanlış adlandırmalara neden olduğunu savunmaktadır. Sözlükler, eleştirel metinler, ansiklopediler, kılavuzlar ve akademik analizlere dayalı doküman incelemesi yöntemiyle, çalışmada Batı yazı geleneği üzerinden “kaligrafi”yi oluşturan unsurların daha belirgin terimlerle ve tarihsel bağlamı içinde yeniden değerlendirilmesi önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kaligrafi, sanat, güzel, gelenek, anlam kayması, anakronizm

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Introduction

Considering the deep-rooted history of Western calligraphy, calligraphic history can be assessed into three main periods. The pre-Gutenberg period is defined as traditional calligraphy, which covers the mid-4th century until the end of the 15th century. It is the manuscript culture that the text was handwritten, and calligraphy had been utilized for recording, copying, preserving, and conveying the text/message. Writers, called scribes, were assigned to fulfill the requirements of related time. These needs might include an order from the church to produce a copy of a manuscript containing sacred texts, the need for resources to be satisfied by the proliferation of universities, or orders for luxuriously illustrated manuscripts embellished with gold that a nobleman wanted to possess as a sign of wealth. For writing these texts, various script forms were developed related to technical and practical needs. Calligraphy in a traditional context was not utilized with the artistic urge nor assessed as a medium to reflect scribes' interpretations, explorations, or feelings. In other words, in its tradition, Western calligraphy was executed as a craft to satisfy the needs, and its core idea is a practice based on functionality. Against this backdrop, this article argues that the widespread use of the term *calligraphy* to describe pre-modern Western script practices constitutes a historiographic anachronism. By conflating functional manuscript writing with later aesthetic and expressive practices, contemporary discourse obscures the historical specificity of Western writing traditions.

With printing technology, when these needs were met more economically and more quickly, it was inevitable that the situation of calligraphy and scribes would change. Especially in the 16th century and onwards, scribes who found the opportunity and space to reflect the individual attitudes mentioned above searched for alternative solutions to survive, such as acquiring knowledge about printing techniques.

The later and notable second period of Western calligraphy can be ranked as the 20th century, which is mainly characterized by the calligraphic revival heralded by the so-called modern era in calligraphy. It is called revival because certain script forms, such as *Caroline minuscule* (*Littera Misnucula Carolina*) of the 8th century, have been reconsidered and redesigned as a typeface called *Foundation Hand*. Calligraphy works based on ancient script forms focus on the appropriateness of the structure and layout of the letter in terms of the functionality sought in the text. It can be said that traces of the scribe's hand and approach began to gain importance in these works. In other words, it was when calligraphy started to be seen through its potential as an art form and began to be stripped of its solely functional entity.

On the other hand, it can be claimed that Western calligraphy today has become an autonomous art form that more and more people explore and utilize as a medium to express and reflect individual approaches and personal understanding of calligraphy. Artists/calligraphers interested in calligraphy create calligraphic works with an interdisciplinary mindset. It is seen that the literal functionality of the written text has transformed and become an area where the creator is in focus and becomes a performer whose individual experience as the process is underlined and comes to the fore rather than the product itself. Text, words, and even letters are not the focal point anymore. In this sense, calligraphic work becomes an open work -as Eco (1989) coins- that is viewed beyond reflecting the semantic meaning of the text as in the case of traditional Western calligraphy. With the contem-

porary attitude of the artists, the written word turned into an abstract image in which the boundaries between the written word and the painted image started to disappear.

These transformations in context and content in calligraphy through its history evoke a search for critical terms to classify or differ these individual approaches of artists/calligraphers, such as "traditional" to refer to the ancient script writing, "modern" for the revival of calligraphy through reinterpretation of various ancient scripts, and "expressive, experimental, or abstract" for gestural writing in which the focus becomes the strokes and the gesture itself that creates image rather than the text with semantic meaning. It is believed that all this terminology in the realm of calligraphy is created primarily due to an anachronistic approach to the term calligraphy itself. These terms are utilized with the concern of classifying or attribution of the personal values of the calligraphers to their calligraphic interpretation. However, these descriptive intentions pave the way for incorrect usage and misnomer of calligraphy. As mentioned, while the traditional approach stands out in the context of functionality, the parameters of today's practices have changed, and even the boundaries drawn have become blurred. The generally accepted definitions have become an issue that must be revised or re-evaluated. Uncertainty and subsequent misuse occurs when these definitions are not sufficiently articulated even by today's literature and artists working in the field. It would be useful to examine these statements comprehensively to create significant insights on this subject. This study aims to point out this alleged misuse and raise awareness on this issue by indicating important points. Evaluating the word calligraphy itself is significant to gain in-depth insight into Western mentality.

This study limits its scope to the Western writing tradition and focuses on terminological usage across three historically distinct phases. The term *ancient script writing* is used to describe Western manuscript practices from the 4th to the 15th centuries, prior to the emergence of the term *calligraphy*. The term *calligraphy* is reserved for post-16th-century usages, when the concept appears alongside early modern and later aesthetic discourses. *Traditional calligraphy*, when used, refers not to an artistic category but to retrospective modern classifications applied to pre-Gutenberg script practices. Medieval calligraphy is therefore treated as a historiographic label rather than a period-accurate concept (Table 1).

Table 1:
Terminological distinctions across Western writing history

Period	Preferred Term	Reason
4th-15th century	Ancient script writing	Calligraphy term did not exist; functional manuscript culture
16th-20th century	Calligraphy/Penmanship	Emergence of term; post-printing aesthetic framing
20th century-today	Expressive / gestural writing	Autonomous, interdisciplinary, performative practices

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design based on documentary analysis in order to investigate the semantic, historical, and contextual transformations of the term *calligraphy* within the Western writing tradition. As the subject of inquiry involves ter-

minological, cultural, and historical dimensions rather than empirical observation, documentary research was selected as the primary method of investigation.

The research corpus consists of three main groups of sources:

1. Linguistic Sources: Etymological dictionaries, online and printed lexicographical databases (e.g., *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster*, *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*), and encyclopedic entries that define or trace the evolution of the term *calligraphy*.

2. Historical and Critical Literature: Books and articles on Western manuscript culture, writing systems, and calligraphy history (Gelb, 1963; Avrin, 1991; Shiner, 2001; Blair, 2008). These efforts helped establish the historical context in which the term “*calligraphy*” emerged and evolved.

3. Contemporary Manuals and Artistic Perspectives: Practical guides, instructional manuals, and statements by calligraphers and visual artists (e.g., Mediavilla, 1996; Stevens, 2013; Johnston, 1917), which offer insights into contemporary interpretations of calligraphy as art, gestural practice, or expressive writing.

The analysis proceeded in two stages:

1. Descriptive Phase: Each source was examined for explicit or implicit definitions of *calligraphy*, with attention to key terms such as “beauty,” “art,” “writing,” “script,” and “gesture.”

2. Critical Phase: Definitions and classifications were compared across time periods to identify anachronisms, semantic shifts, and cross-cultural misalignments (especially in relation to Chinese *shufa*, Japanese *shodo*, and Islamic *khatt*).

This method was chosen to reveal how *calligraphy* has been used historically, and how contemporary applications may diverge from its original context pointing to conceptual ambiguity in both academic and artistic discourse.

The term “calligraphy” and its critical analysis Calligraphy as “the art of calligraphy”

As a concept, calligraphy is explained as (1) “(a) artistic, stylized or elegant handwriting or lettering;” (b) “the art of producing such writing;” (2) penmanship;” (3) “an ornamental line in drawing or painting” in *Online Merriam - Webster’s Dictionary* (n.d.). With the term penmanship, it points to two definitions as follows: (1) “the art or practice of writing with the pen;” and (2) “quality or style of handwriting.” Furthermore, the *Diccionario de la Lengua Catalana* (n.d.) defines the Catalan word *cal·ligrafia*, which means calligraphy, as the art of writing the letters of an alphabet by following the model. It underlines an aesthetic intent. In the same way with Catalan reference, *Gran Enciclopèdia Catalana* (1986) describes the word *cal·ligrafia* as the art of writing the letters of an alphabet artificially. The Spanish word means *caligrafía* describes as the art form of writing utilizing beautiful and correctly formed letters, which may contain different styles that characterize the person’s writing of a document (*Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, n.d.). Moreover, *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo - Americana* (1911) defines *caligrafía* as the art of beautiful writing and correctly written art form. Here, writing refers to the representation of sound with beauty, which refers to the graphic sign and its visual appearance and prominent characteristic features of calligraphy can be ranked as beauty, writing, art concept, aesthetic intent. These general definitions seem to characterize all calligraphy practices that covers all Western geography rather than definitions that indicate a specific period of time. In other words, it defines calligraphy as a discipline that

removes its historical process and context, assesses calligraphy as a general term and places it in a more universal context.

On the other hand, the statement that calligraphy is an art, which is found in many literatures, is noteworthy. Various books employ this statement in their titles such as Harris (1995) *The Art of Calligraphy: A Practical Guide to the Skills and Techniques*; Ferraro, Metcalf, and others (2011) *The Art of Calligraphy & Lettering*, Smith (2016) *The Art of Calligraphy: Mastering Techniques Through Practical Projects*, Boot (2018) *The Art of Calligraphy*, Toffaletti (2022) *The Art of Calligraphy Letters: Creative Lettering for Beginners*. These calligraphy manuals cover theoretical, practical, and technical knowledge about Western calligraphy. They describe the formulations of various ancient scripts from traditional models while mentioning their modern applications. In this understanding, which includes both traditional and modern forms, describing all applications as art is a wrong qualification that is needed to explain.

The concept of art in a modern sense is a comprehensive theme, and what art is or is not is outside the scope of this paper. According to the above definitions, the general evaluation of calligraphy as an art, covers all of the previously mentioned traditional, modern, and current calligraphy practices. First, it is important to examine so-called traditional calligraphy, especially considering the Middle Ages, when calligraphy experienced its golden age.

Eco (1986) examined art as a concept in medieval times and mentions “how far they were from any conception of art as a creative force” (1986, p. 95). He claims that there was no art concept in the modern sense, instead mentions the concept of making/producing. According to him, there are two basic elements related to art: knowledge (*ratio, cogitation*) and production (*faciendi, factibilium*). These elements are framed as “a knowledge of the rules for making things” (Eco, 1986, p. 92). The constructed object -the production- must primarily fulfill the expected function, not meant to be enjoyed aesthetically. As demonstrated by Avrin (1991) and Drogin (1989), dominant medieval script forms such as *carolingian minuscule* and *gothic textura quadrata* were developed primarily to enhance legibility, consistency, and transmission efficiency rather than artistic expression. While illuminated manuscripts combined text and image, their visual elaboration served symbolic, didactic, or devotional functions rather than individual artistic authorship.

Furthermore, in Greek, related to the word art, *aretas* refers to “a capacity for making something,” and “a power of the practical intellect” (Eco, 1986, p. 92), which means the medieval theory of art related to the word *ars* as a concept associated to technology and artisanry in a modern sense. It is not assessed as an expression of the individual; instead, with its particular rules, it is a construction needed to fulfill its function, whether it is the construction of a ship or a building, making a sword, or painting.

Moreover, Shiner mentions the word art derived from the Latin word *ars* and the Greek word *techne*. These terms refer to a broad sense of craft works such as “carpentry, and poetry, shoemaking and medicine, sculpture and horse breaking” (2001, p. 20). In other words, here, it is underlined the ability to make an object itself that requires a certain amount of time to acquire the sufficient skill for it. Shiner (2001) claims that the division between the craft and fine art categories in the sense of modern ideas and practices of art started in the 18th century in Europe, whereas Risatti (2013) points to the 16th century.

On the other hand, the term *artista* (artist), which was coined in Middle Ages, comes from *ars* that refers to craftsmen, the students of the liberal arts (Risatti, 2013) and later periods, the term

artist and *artisan* started to be used interchangeably refer to someone who practices activities such as painting or shoemaking. In other words, these people were assessed as craftsmen and makers of useful things (Shiner, 2001).

At this point, it is highly crucial to explained that the very first citation of the word calligraphy dates back to 1590. It is claimed that the term first appears in the sense of (1) "in the book of writing master and calligrapher Peter Bales (1547-1610?), entitled the Writing Schoolemaster, the second earlier citation dates back to 1645 in the sense of definition" (2) "appears in the first edition of Colasterion written by poet and polemicist John Milton. Finally, for the" (3) "definition, British newspaper The Observed published 1928 gives as the earliest citation" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). In other words, the very first use in question refers to the post-Gutenberg period, when the printing press with movable type and before that there is no concept of calligraphy literally not the word calligraphy itself but also the art concept cannot be mentioned before the 18th century.

Additionally, looking at the traditional practices of writing/copying text, there were no words as calligrapher, instead scribes were used to refer the craftsman who wrote text, prepared manuscripts. The word scribe as a verb comes from Latin *scriber* and refers to "to write," as a noun comes from Latin *scriba* refers to "keeper of accounts, secretary, writer" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, n.d). They were generally anonymous workers rather than practitioners of art. The phrase "servant of the text" is used to refer to these scribes that frame their duty as an obligation rather than artistic aspiration. This issue was discussed in a symposium titled *Servi Textus: Servants of the Text*, held at Saint John's Abbey and University in Collegeville, Minnesota, in 1996. Brown (2017) underlines that this commission mentions preserving scriptural value above artistic concerns that point to scribes charged for copying the text as not supposed to express or reflect any individual expressions. In other words, they were not artists in the modern sense.

In this sense, the period begins with the 4th century until the 15th century, so-called traditional calligraphy, is actually the ancient script writing period, and considering these practices as art and the ancient scribes as artists create a misevaluation of that period. If there is a significant distinction to mention for the Western writing period of this time, it is the distinction between "script" and "hand."

Scripts are the hand written ancient typefaces that are divided for two main categories; formal and informal scripts. Formal scripts were utilized for formal documents and luxury manuscripts. Scribe was supposed to write legible, clear, well-constructed letter forms which also revealed the skill of the writer. Informal scripts were utilized for informal documents, executed hastily with speed to everyday usage. For either form of scripts, scribe was trained and supposed to be master them. Nevertheless, a hand refers to writing what a scribe put down on a page without plan that means scribe reveals his own hand (Drogin, 1989).

Either way - script or hand - there was clear aim about the action and the product. The act is writing and the product is any document or manuscript that were produced due to the functional reason. With all these considerations, evaluating the script works of that period in the context of today's understanding of art and artists reveals that the term art is not an accurate expression of ancient script writing practices.

Furthermore, in the case of Western calligraphy, the reference to the aesthetic perception in the art object and the acceptance of it as art in today's understanding and perception come from

trying to make sense of the Western writing tradition through similar expressions and terms with the Far Eastern (Chinese *shufa* and Japanese *shodo*) and Middle Eastern (*khatt*, in particular, the Islamic writing tradition) writing traditions.

Shufa consists of two characters in the Chinese language: *shu* refers to writing and writing text, *fa* refers to law, method, and way. It is expressed as "the art and the discipline of writing" (Iezzi, 2013, p. 159). On the other hand, *shodo* refers to the "art of writing," "a way of writing" that is assessed as one of the ways of meditational practice (Tara, 2014), through the word *sho* means "writing" and *do* means "way" (Sato, 2014, p. 10). To comprehend *shufa* and *shodo*, it is significant to examine its features and its perception and application briefly. Both forms of writing underline how they are executed through the word "way." Creating these forms as art requires being prepared physically and mentally because learning breath control and focusing on energy (*qi/Chi*) are the core ideas behind them. These activities are considered performances in which the writers/creators reflect their personalities, moods, and skills. The beauty in *shufa* and *shodo* comes from the inner and outer beauty created through the unification of mind and body in action embellished by the body's power, vitality, and stamina physically, as well the courage, ability, and potential skillful accomplishment. In other words, courage comes from the artistic minds that motivate the body, and writing is embodied as the art of beauty.

On the other hand, the Arabic noun *khatt* as a word defined as "line, streak, stripe, track, path, road" (Blair, 2008: xxv), also derived from "line, design, and construction" (Kaestle, 2008, np.). It can be stated that the tradition of *khatt* is closely bound to the trace notion. *Khatt* is assessed as an essential part of religion because the Holy Book Qur'an was written with that leads to attribute it divine and *khatt* becomes one of the core expressions of Islam as an art representation (Al-Nasrawi, Al-mukhtar, & Al-Baldawi, 2015)

Neither behind the mindset of *shodo*, *shufa*, *khatt*, there is no clear distinction between writing and calligraphy as in Western mentality, nor do these three have the same mentality behind the functional entity as Western writing tradition has. On the contrary, with various motivations because they are practices by artistic urge. With this brief information, understanding these concepts through the word calligraphy creates the debate in this sense, and the usage of the word calligraphy - Chinese/Japanese or Islamic calligraphy - is misused leading to false perceptions and understandings of their inner values and meanings. It doesn't reflect the core meaning behind these mindsets. With the similar attitude, calling Chinese/Japanese or Islamic calligraphy causes to comprehend Western writing tradition through the concept of art of *shufa*, *shodo* or *khatt*, which leads to the mentioned misnomer of the word calligraphy referring to the Western practices.

Calligraphy as "beautiful writing"

The reason ancient script writing practices - traditional calligraphy - are considered an art may lie in the fact that the Greek term *kallos*, which is one of the components of the term calligraphy, is translated into English as beauty/beautiful, and this perception of beauty is evaluated through current aesthetics and perception of beauty. With this assessment, it will be significant to examine the word through *kallos* and *graphos* terms.

The word calligraphy is derived from *kaligrafia*, Greek word contains two components; *kallos*, meaning "beauty," and *-graphein*, meaning "to write." In this context, calligraphy is explained in English word as "beautiful writing" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, n.d.). In addition to this explanation, *Online Encyclopedia Britannica* (n.d.) gives the definition as "the art of beautiful handwriting,"

considering the Greek word's same translation. It can be claimed that the word beauty/beautiful expressed with this etymological translation indicates that calligraphy has been evaluated as art. However, when considering the Middle Ages, evaluating the concept of beauty in today's context, just like the concept of art, is an anachronistic approach. If it is examined in its related context, it can be seen that *kallos*, *kalos*, or *kalon* (beautiful, the beautiful) is expressed as "the (morally) beautiful, the idea good" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, n.d.).

One of the ancient Greek historians, philosopher, and soldier Xenophon from Athens (c. 430 BC-354 BC), in his *Memorabilia* (c. 371 BC), intends to classify the artistic practice within three aesthetic categories: "*Ideal beauty*, which represents nature by means of a montage of the parts; *Spiritual Beauty*, which expresses the soul through the eye (as in the sculptures of Praxiteles, who painted the eyes to make them look more realistic); and *Useful*, or *Functional Beauty*" (Eco, 2004, p. 48). On the other hand, both Plato (429? - 347 BC) and Aristotle (384 BC - 322 BC) mentions harmony and proportion of the parts with beauty, as well as, good souls morally that is assessed as harmonious or well-proportioned. Plato distinguished beauty from physical consideration and was not bound to a sensible object with its existence. It does not relate to what the eyes see. Instead, it relates to senses that are supposed to be detached by an intellectual sight that refers to knowledge about arts and philosophy. In other words, beauty is assessed as a term that someone needs the capacity to appreciate (Eco, 2004).

Eco (1986) mentions the term beauty, as a concept of Medieval times, as "beauty as purely intelligible as the beauty of moral harmony and metaphysical splendor" (Eco, 1986, p. 5) in which it refers to everyday feeling related to the experience that lived. Considering the art concept, he points to the term beauty related to the appropriate measure and symmetry of the parts. According to the assessment of Eco (2004), the beauty of Greek perception seems parallel to the modern understanding due to attributed values and not limited to one direction; however, in terms of Western calligraphy, Johnston (1917) relates beauty with a form of the letter, letter shape, and its construction. Each letter as a visual material object has specific forms that must be written with related instructions. Achieving the proper form of letter and its compositions requires technical and practical knowledge and practice to acquire the skill to manipulate the material. Under these conditions, good-quality writing can be encountered.

Goudy (1963) utilizes the word beauty to refer to well-constructed letters as Johnston (1917) mentions. According to Goudy (1963), intrinsic shape of the model of the letter, its lines, curves and angles, also the directions of the lines and overall composition are features that are needed to be considered. If the particular model of letter fits its place and serves its purposes of intentions, it is the beauty of calligraphy (Goudy, 1963). In other words, it can be claimed that beauty in calligraphy strictly bound to the construction of a letter form and its organizations as composition. It is supposed to be written in a well-constructed manner that refers to solid function of the written text of calligraphy related to the Western writing system and its mentality. Hence, assessing *kallos* within the concept of contemporary artistic mindset and the beauty concept will be insignificant and incorrect.

Various Critics related to Bibliograph

Looking at current literature, how calligraphy is defined and described reveals various misusages and misconceptions through the various explanations in this bibliography as well.

Drogin (1989), in his book *Medieval Calligraphy: Its History and Techniques*, defines calligraphy as a beautifully written art

form covering various styles utilized for various purposes. He underlines well-constructed letter forms, embellishes personal attitudes, and reveals artistic expressions. He underlines the function of written text, which is written by following certain rules. In this sense, it can be claimed that Drogin mostly covers the modern version of the term so-called calligraphic revival under the title "Medieval calligraphy." On the other hand, with "medieval calligraphy" terms, he refers to the ancient Western script writing tradition when the term calligraphy had not been coined yet.

Vargas (2010), in his book *Caligrafía*, defines calligraphy as an act of art with well-constructed letters in a proper way of writing. In this book, the well-constructed letter and the overall composition are underlined, which points to calligraphy as a functional entity. If traditional writing is in question, as mentioned earlier, it is debatable whether it can be called "calligraphy" or defined as an act of art.

On the other hand, Chazal (2013), in her book *Calligraphy: A Complete Guide*, focuses on leaving a visible mark loaded with emotions as the act of a human being's desire while mentioning calligraphy. She underlines the expressive potential of calligraphy as an expression of speech. At this point, it is significant to mention the Western writing system and its appreciation as the written form of a spoken language, especially alphabetic writing, defined as the "reduction of dynamic sound to quiescent space, the separation of the word from the living present, where alone spoken words can exist" (Ong, 2002, p. 80). As a substitute for speech writing in Western mentality, the origin and its trigger focused on necessity as a communication method to convey the thoughts (Gelb, 1963) and evolved around satisfying the functional needs. As "the graphic counterpart of speech" (Diringer, 1962, p. 14), Western writing became a tool as a system of communication. Phonographic writing -one sign representing one sound- is directly related to the spoken language and reflects the sounds of the reader's written word pronunciation. It is assessed as the last step and considered the most advanced and improved stage of writing by Avrin (1991) and Gelb (1963). What takes attention here, assessing the phonetic writing system, is on the top of a hierarchical development ranking between the writing systems because it is relatively easy to learn and easy to become literal in this language. This assessment provides insight into the mindset behind Western writing and the mentality that presents being functional, developed as a functional entity, writing form of speech rather than reflecting the feelings or emotions of the writer through its visual appearance as an expressive form of art. Likewise, ancient Western script writing -so-called traditional calligraphy- was utilized as functional entity as mentioned earlier. It was meant to be read consists of semantic meaning of the message/text. These rigid boundaries create sharp distinction between writing and painting, image and text. The visual form of written text stuck in the acceptance of well-constructed clear forms because they were meant to be recognized and read. It seems the main reason that various bibliographies and calligraphers mentioned here describes calligraphy as an art form and attribute meaning to it as a medium of individual expression because there is no platform in which these individual interpretations or experimentations can be reflected in writing and traditional calligraphy, particularly in the West.

Furthermore, it should be mentioned the terms *-graphein*, the second component of the word calligraphy, which is defined as the "process of writing or recording," in modern use, "writing, recording, or description." It follows as from French or German *-graphie*, from Greek *-graphia* is explained as "write, express by written characters," earlier "to draw, represent by lines drawn," originally "to scrape, scratch" (on clay tablets with a stylus). It

means *graphein* refers to a broad sense of act as writing (Online Etymological Dictionary, n.d.), that refers to various forms of written text that is not just literally written but also carved, drawn, painted, scraped or scratched. It is seen the clear reflection of the sharp boundaries between Western writing and painting mentioned in this subject and the areas that are considered to be separated from each other in this direction through the statements of a calligrapher, Niels Shoe Meulman, who tries to position his understanding of calligraphy beyond the functional and self-reading logic of the West. Graffiti-based calligrapher Meulman has a distinctive contemporary attitude to calligraphy and developed a style called *calligraffiti*, which is a fusion of graffiti and calligraphy. He mostly employs brush and brooms and performs calligraphy as an act. He calls himself a painter rather than a writer because of his painterly act of writing and calligraphic images, which are likened to abstract painting images. His motto is “words as images” (Consiglio, 2013, para. 8), focusing on the strokes and gestures of the hand with the trigger act of writing. Considering the comprehensive meaning of *graphein* (writing), which is performed by writing, as well as drawing and painting, at its core, it is not wholly separated from painting. Painting can be employed as a writing technique. In other words, calligraphy, hence writing, has its intrinsic potential that a letter is a construction of strokes and gestures that can be painted/written.

Calligrapher Mediavilla (1996) is one of the calligraphers who question the term calligraphy as a misunderstood term that is close to the assessment of this paper. He states that describing calligraphy as beautiful writing is a very limited definition of calligraphy, and he defends this by observing the term writing and comparing writing and calligraphy. According to him, “Writing acquires meaning through legibility and the process of alphabetic reading. On the other hand, calligraphy can acquire meaning through silence since it is intended to be expressive and artistic rather than strictly utilitarian” (Mediavilla, 1996, p. 17). This potential of writing seems to be stuck within the self-limiting mentality on which the western writing system was built. The situation that writing and calligraphy are two different fields is a situation that parallels the Western approach to writing, as mentioned above. Here, writing, as a system, is in an effort to differentiate itself from calligraphy by claiming that it is not an artistic form due to its functional characteristics. However, when looked at from a different perspective, calligraphy is already a writing practice because writing is an umbrella term that consists of various form of writing such as calligraphy, lettering and typography, and focusing on the strokes and gestures and creating abstract-like images. This reveals that writing has an unprecedented potential within itself, not a rejection of tradition by breaking away from it by taking on a different form. In other words, writing and calligraphy are forms that contain expressive features within themselves, essentially built on strokes and writing gestures.

Another calligrapher who examines the word calligraphy, primarily through the works produced in the field today, is Stevens (2013), who has the title of the book *Scribe: Artist of The Written Word*. He criticizes the term calligraphy, “the word calligraphy is not big enough to capture the best of our work today” (Stevens, 2013, p. 15), which stuck to the term penmanship; hence, it is not enough because it does not cover the contemporary attitudes. Here, what is highly significant is not the word itself but the interpretation or comprehension of the word calligraphy itself formed the misnomer. It should be underlined once again with the evaluations made so far that the word calligraphy, with its components of both beauty and the act of writing, has the potential to reflect the writer’s/artists’s/performer’s feelings, emotions, and appreciation through an understanding of art.

Conclusion

The (Table 2) illustrates the evolution of the terminology and perceptions of Western calligraphy across three major phases: the pre-Gutenberg era (functional script traditions), the post-Gutenberg revival (emergence of the term and artistic connotations), and contemporary practices (expressive, gestural, and interdisciplinary approaches). The diagram highlights how the retroactive use of the term *calligraphy* creates anachronistic and misleading interpretations.

Table 2:
Calligraphy terminology across time

Period	Terminology	Characteristics	Terminological Issue
Pre-Gutenberg (4th-15th c.)	Script, hand, scribe	Writing as a functional practice: recording, copying, transmitting texts executed by scribes, not artists.	The word <i>calligraphy</i> did not exist; applying it retrospectively is anachronistic.
Post-Gutenberg/Revival (16th-20th c.)	Calligraphy, penmanship, lettering	After printing, the word <i>calligraphy</i> emerges; revival movements and reinterpreting historical scripts.	“Calligraphy=art” perception develops, but retroactive definitions misrepresent medieval writing practices.
Contemporary (20th c.-today)	Expressive, experimental, gestural writing	Calligraphy practiced as an autonomous art form; emphasis on individuality, gesture, interdisciplinarity, performance.	Blurred boundaries: Western traditions often conflated with <i>shodo</i> , <i>shufa</i> , <i>khatt</i> , leading to misinterpretations.

With their deep-rooted history, Western calligraphy practices have undergone various transformations from the mid-4th century until today. Although it seems like a remarkable transformation has occurred with its visual dimension, it is more accurate to say that this transformation reflects awareness in the mindsets about what calligraphy is and how it is perceived and applied.

It can be argued that the functionality, readability, and explicit mission of preserving, copying, and transmitting information/messages of writing in the Middle Ages transformed over time, and artists made room for themselves as autonomous mediums of expression within the realm of Western calligraphy.

First of all, studies and more accurate determinations on these transformations observed in calligraphy are possible by understanding and making more accurate definitions of the word calligraphy in parallel with the perspective and perception of writing in the Western world. Being conscious and gaining

awareness of this issue is very important in terms of seeing the intrinsic expressive potential of both writing and Western calligraphy in particular.

In this study, with this approach, it is first tried to reveal that are described as calligraphy and that point to the practices of the medieval manuscript period are actually explanations made specifically about *kallos* and *graphos* and their approaches with today's art mindset are an anachronistic and wrong assessment. Since the word calligraphy was first coined in the 16th century, it is more appropriate to call ancient script writing tradition instead of calligraphy to refer to the time period before the 16th century.

Today, Western calligraphy is practiced and appreciated as a universal art form that is not limited to any mindset. It has reached a dimension that has passed from vernacular to universality, where the audience can experience aesthetic emotions through its plastic value beyond the need to read without being stuck in the language barrier.

In fact, this transformation comes with the perception and realization of the inherent potential of calligraphy in the Western world. In this sense, it is very important for research and studies in the field of calligraphy to first understand well the issues of what calligraphy is and what it is not, the issues of definition and description, and to evaluate them according to their time.

The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that much of the ambiguity surrounding the term calligraphy arises from its retroactive and generalized application across historically distinct phases of Western writing. When terminological distinctions are not articulated in relation to historical context, function, and authorial intent, practices grounded in functional manuscript production are easily misinterpreted through later aesthetic frameworks. In particular, the widespread use of calligraphy to describe pre-Gutenberg script practices obscures the fundamentally utilitarian logic of medieval writing systems and conflates them with post-16th-century developments in which individual expression and artistic authorship become increasingly visible. From this perspective, clarifying such distinctions is not merely a matter of semantic precision, but a necessary step toward a more historically accurate understanding of Western writing traditions and their transformation over time. By differentiating ancient script writing from later calligraphic and expressive practices, this study underscores the importance of preserving historical specificity while acknowledging the contemporary expansion of calligraphy as an autonomous artistic field.

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Yapılandırılmış Özet

Giriş: Bu çalışma, “kaligrafi” teriminin Batı yazı geleneği içindeki tarihsel kökeni ile günümüzdeki kullanım biçimleri arasındaki kavramsal gerilimi incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Günümüzde kaligrafi çoğu zaman “güzel yazı sanatı” olarak tanımlanmakta; bu tanım hem popüler kültürde hem sözlüklerde hem de akademik literatürde yaygın biçimde tekrar edilmektedir. Ancak bu kullanım, Batı’nın Orta Çağ ve Gutenberg öncesi yazı kültürünün tarihsel ve işlevsel yapısıyla tam olarak örtüşmemektedir. Bu bağlamda çalışma, kaligrafi teriminin geriye dönük olarak Orta Çağ yazı pratiklerine uygulanmasının tarihsel açıdan anakronik bir değerlendirme oluşturduğunu ileri sürmektedir.

Araştırma, özellikle Batı yazı geleneğinin Çin shufa, Japon shodo ve İslam hat geleneğiyle aynı kavramsal kategori içinde ele alınmasının, yazının kültürel ve zihinsel temellerini göz ardı eden genelleyici bir yaklaşım olduğunu savunmaktadır. Bu geleneklerin her biri yazıyı farklı ontolojik ve estetik çerçeveler içinde konumlandırırken, Batı yazı pratiğinin tarihsel olarak işlevsellik, okunurluk ve metin aktarımı merkezli bir üretim alanı olduğu görülmektedir. Çalışma bu bağlamda kaligrafi kavramının tarihsel bağlamından koparılarak genişletilmesinin terminolojik belirsizlik ve anlam kayması ürettiğini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Yöntem: Araştırma, nitel araştırma yaklaşımı çerçevesinde doküman incelemesine dayanmaktadır. Çalışmada üç ana kaynak grubu sistematik olarak analiz edilmiştir:

(1) Etimolojik sözlükler, tarihsel dil veri tabanları ve ansiklopedik kaynaklar aracılığıyla calligraphy teriminin kökeni, ilk kullanımları ve anlam evrimi incelenmiştir. Yunanca kallos (güzel) ve graphein (yazmak) köklerine dayanan kavramın Batı dillerindeki tarihsel yayılımı karşılaştırmalı biçimde değerlendirilmiştir.

(2) Batı yazı tarihi, Orta Çağ el yazması kültürü, skriptorium üretim sistemi ve yazıcı (scribe) pratiği üzerine akademik literatür incelenmiştir. Bu aşamada yazının üretim koşulları, estetik anlayışı, mesleki statüsü ve işlevsel bağlamı analiz edilmiştir.

(3) 19. ve 20. yüzyıl sonrası kaligrafi kılavuzları, sanatçı metinleri ve çağdaş kaligrafi pratiklerine ilişkin yayınlar değerlendirilerek, modern dönemde kaligrafinin “sanat” kategorisi içinde yeniden tanımlanma süreci çözümlenmiştir.

Analiz süreci iki aşamada yürütülmüştür. İlk aşamada kavramın farklı dönemlerde nasıl tanımlandığı betimsel olarak ortaya konmuş; ikinci aşamada bu tanımlar tarihsel üretim koşullarıyla karşılaştırılarak anakronizm, semantik genişleme ve kavramsal kayma örüntüleri belirlenmiştir. Bu yöntem, kavramın tarihsel bağlamından koparıldığı noktaları görünür kılmayı amaçlamıştır.

Bulgular: Araştırma bulguları, calligraphy teriminin Batı yazı geleneğinde yaygın kullanımının 16. yüzyıl sonrasına tarihlendiğini göstermektedir. Buna karşın 4.–15. yüzyıllar arasındaki Batı yazı pratikleri günümüzde sıklıkla kaligrafi başlığı altında değerlendirilmektedir. Oysa bu dönem yazı kültürü, esas olarak metinlerin çoğaltılması, korunması ve aktarılması amacıyla örgütlenmiş zanaat temelli bir üretim sistemidir. Yazıcılar bireysel sanatçılar olarak değil, metinsel doğruluğu ve biçimsel düzeni sağlayan uzman uygulayıcılar olarak konumlandırılmıştır. Bunun yanı sıra, “güzel yazı” tanımındaki “güzel” kavramının modern estetik anlayış çerçevesinde yorumlanmasının tarihsel bir yanılsama yarattığını göstermektedir. Antik ve Orta Çağ bağlamında güzellik, bireysel ifade veya özgünlükten ziyade oran, düzen, okunurluk ve işlevsel uygunlukla ilişkilidir. Modern sanat kavramının 18. yüzyıl sonrasında ortaya çıkmasıyla birlikte yazının estetik statüsü geriye dönük olarak yeniden yorumlanmıştır. Bu durum, Orta Çağ yazı pratiğinin sanat kategorisi içinde değerlendirilmesini tarihsel olarak problemlili hâle getirmektedir.

Bulgular ayrıca, kaligrafi teriminin Batı yazı pratiğine uygulanmasında modern tipografik estetik anlayışın belirleyici olduğunu göstermektedir. 19. yüzyıl sonrasında el yazısının mekanik baskıya karşı nostaljik ve estetik bir değer olarak yeniden konumlandırılması, Orta Çağ yazı kültürünün de benzer bir estetik kategori içine yerleştirilmesine zemin hazırlamıştır. Bu süreçte yazının üretim bağlamı ile güncel algısı arasındaki fark silikleşmiş; metin aktarımına dayalı kolektif üretim sistemi, bireysel ifade ve sanatsal özgünlük perspektifiyle yeniden okunmuştur. Böylece “kaligrafi” kavramı tarihsel bir üretim biçimini değil, modern estetik beklentileri yansıtan bir projeksiyonu temsil eder hâle gelmiştir. Bu durum, terimin geriye dönük kullanımında kavramsal genelleme ve tarihsel indirgeme riskini artırmaktadır.

Bir diğer önemli bulgu, Batı kaligrafisinin Çin shufa, Japon shodo ve İslam hat geleneğiyle eş anlamlı biçimde kullanılmasının kavramsal karışıklık üretmesidir. Doğu Asya ve İslam yazı geleneklerinde yazı; estetik, ruhani ve felsefi pratiğin doğrudan parçası olarak konumlandırılmıştır. Yazının icrası bedensel disiplin, ruhsal arınma ve metafizik anlam katmanlarıyla ilişkilidir. Buna karşılık Batı yazı geleneği tarihsel olarak metnin okunurluğu ve aktarımı üzerine kuruludur. Bu zihinsel ve kültürel farklar dikkate alınmadan yapılan genellemeler, kavramın analitik gücünü zayıflatmaktadır.

Sonuç: Çalışma, kaligrafi teriminin Batı yazı geleneğinde tarihsel bağlamından koparılarak genelleştirilmesinin akademik ve terminolojik sorunlara yol açtığını ortaya koymaktadır. Gutenberg öncesi Batı yazı pratiğinin “kaligrafi sanatı” olarak adlandırılması anakroniktir ve modern sanat kavramının geriye dönük uygulanmasıyla ilişkilidir. Bu nedenle 4.–15. yüzyıl Batı yazı kültürü için “manuscript writing tradition” ya da “script culture” gibi tarihsel olarak daha uygun terimlerin kullanılması önerilmektedir. Ayrıca Batı yazı geleneği ile Doğu Asya ve İslam yazı geleneklerinin tek bir kavram altında toplanması yerine, her birinin kendi kültürel, felsefi ve tarihsel bağlamında değerlendirilmesi gerekmektedir. Terminolojik açıklık, yalnızca dilsel bir hassasiyet değil; tarihsel doğruluk ve kavramsal tutarlılık açısından da zorunludur.

Sonuç olarak çalışma, kaligrafi kavramının tamamen yeniden tanımlanmasını değil; tarihsel bağlamına uygun ve analitik olarak tutarlı biçimde sınıflandırılmasını savunmaktadır. Bu yaklaşım, Batı yazı tarihinin işlevsel köklerini görünür kılarken, çağdaş kaligrafinin sanatsal ve performatif açılımlarını daha net bir kavramsal zemine oturtmaya olanak sağlamaktadır.