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Book review

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Abstract

This facsimile edition of the so-called Alphabet Book, written by the churchman Amos Lewis in England around 1585 offers a valuable framework for revisiting both past and present research focused on the revitalized field of historical calligraphic artefacts. The following book review examines the content and material features of the manuscript, with particular attention to the sociohistorical and cultural context of Elizabethan England in which it was elaborated. Considerations about the previous arts of writing that likely influenced the author contribute to a better understanding of key aspects of early modern handwritten culture including the form, functions, circulation and impact of such distinctive specimens.

Keywords

Alphabet books, writing manuals, calligraphy, Western calligraphy tradition, palaeography, Amos Lewis

Introduction

This very fine and carefully designed facsimile edition, with a foreword and introduction by Simon Swynfen Jervis, was published by John Adamson with financial support from the Kythera Foundation. The calligraphic original was not, however, completely unknown, as it had already been included in the exhibition organised by Joyce Irene Whalley, between July and September 1980, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, entitled *The Universal Penman: A Survey of Western Calligraphy from the Roman Period to 1980*. 'Amos Lewis's Alphabet Book' (hereinafter, ALAB), the factitious title given to it by Jervis himself, is one of many examples of the exuberant quest for writing perfection and virtuosity behind the enormous modern body of European handwritten and printed calligraphic works.

Although the biographical data on Amos Lewis in the England of 1585 is sparse and there is little conclusive information on the circumstances of the production of this manuscript, a careful reading of Jervis's edition and his very interesting hypotheses is illuminating for the researcher specialised in the history of calligraphic practices, outcomes and transmissions.

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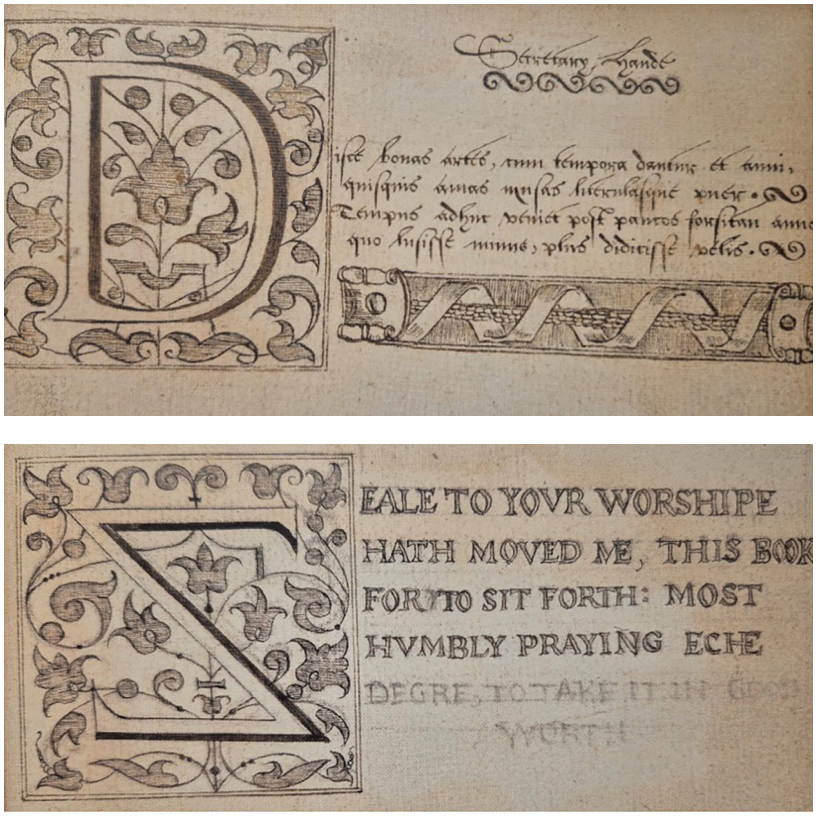

Fig. 1: *Alphabet Book* of Amos Lewis, fols 8 and 28, details.

This relative obscurity of ALAB and its author goes back a long way. As I have confirmed, neither the famous essay by Robert More (1716) nor the article by Edward Fairbrother Strange (1897) mentions Amos Lewis.[1] However, this scarcity of information is not a limitation for Jervis, but rather an invitation to raise some leading questions in the introduction: How was a Londoner of modest origins who occupied only a low-level position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy able to attain this level of calligraphic specialisation and to produce such an alphabet book? With what intention and for what purpose?

An example of the renewed calligraphic research

Despite the long list of recognized scribes, calligraphers, and penmanship practitioners throughout Europe, both professional and occasional, who with greater or lesser intensity and fortune have left their mark on the history of the art of writing since the sixteenth century, the remarkable quantity of anonymous manuscripts continues to be surprising. As is the number of practically unknown authors whose names and life circumstances have left behind no more than a few lines in the extensive bibliography, which, of international interest, evokes the considerably varied forms of research into the history of calligraphy.

[1] Robert More 1716; Edward Fairbrother Strange 1897.

The aforementioned exhibition in London (1980), and a previous one focussing on the Dutch writing masters (The Hague, 1978),[2] are two contributions to the series of exhibits, projects and compilations responsible for an extraordinary worldwide resurgence of retrospective calligraphic studies. Indeed, the 2015–2016 exhibition at the National Library of Spain (BNE) in Madrid, entitled *Spanish Calligraphy: the Art of Writing*, and the most recent one, which opened in 2023 at the Deutsches Romantik-Museum (*Schreiben mit der Hand in der Zeit der Romantik*),[3] are just a few of the significant examples that can be cited. The catalogues from these exhibitions could well be added to the reprints of calligrapher biobibliographies and the reference works and bibliographic repertoires indispensable for staying abreast of the latest developments in the study of medieval and modern calligraphy. On the other hand, the lists of 'books of fine writing' oblige us to consult in Germany the works of Werner Doede (1958);[4] in Italy those of Johnson (1950)[5] and Bonacini (1953)[6]; in Spain those of Rico y Sinobas (1903),[7] Cotarelo y Mori (1916)[8] and Martínez Pereira (2006)[9]; in France those of Mediavilla (2006);[10] etc.

Regardless of the terms used to describe and to refer to these calligraphic materials and of their obvious differences (an 'art of writing' is not exactly the same as a 'copy book' or an 'ABC book'), the special collections and institutions that historically have stored these materials worldwide must be taken into account. Under the umbrella of innovative digital palaeography, they are essential for consolidating research, fuelling cutting-edge comparative studies, and providing new perspectives into the analysis of 'beautiful writing'.

Hence, and again from an international perspective, ALAB would need to be related to similar earlier, contemporaneous, and later works among the numerous calligraphic originals, manuscripts and prints preserved, for example, in the Newberry Library (Chicago), the Klingspor Museum (Offenbach am Main), the Herzog August Bibliothek (Wolfenbüttel), the Hofer Collection (Harvard),[11] the Bucerius Library of the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe (Hamburg),[12] the Rico y Sinobas collection (Students Residence, Madrid), the Del Olmo & Vilas collection of the Imprenta Municipal – Artes del Libro (Madrid), the Berliner Kunstbibliothek,[13] or the Pierson Library (Amsterdam). To this incomplete list, one must also add original calligraphic pieces held at various

[2] Van Uchelen 1978.

[3] Dietzel 2023.

[4] Doede 1958.

[5] Johnson 1950.

[6] Bonacini 1953.

[7] Rico y Sinobas 1903.

[8] Cotarelo y Mori 1916.

[9] Martínez Pereira 2006.

[10] Mediavilla 2006.

[11] Becker 1997.

[12] Wendland 2006.

[13] Bobak et al. 2023.

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times in private hands, such as the 'Spanish notebook' by the master Baldrich Van Horicke (*c.*1616), acquired by a Spanish collector, which was the subject of an in-depth study.[14]

After a detailed reading of Jervis's introduction, a summarized list of topics he addresses would range from the historical, social and cultural contextualization of the ALAB, to the early modern calligraphic influences that can be traced in the manuscript. Materiality, types of scripts reproduced, text contents and decoration styles will also help to understand the purposes and scope of such a handwritten artefact.[15] Nevertheless, some questions like the following might arise: To what extent do editions like this one and original pieces like Amos Lewis's work have anything new to contribute to the scientific study of beautiful writing, a highly specialised area of interest? Where should we situate the production, transmission, and effective use of these calligraphic works within the handwritten culture of each historical period?

A *priori*, some answers might be found in the broad perspective with which *Schriftlichkeit* is defined, which encompasses concepts such as the constitution, form and function of manuscript texts, as well as the preparation, production, and competence to execute these texts, or the repercussions of their existence in the public or private sphere. All of this provides an initial useful conceptual frame of reference for approaching the analysis, significance, and evaluation of manuscript specimens endowed with unique ornamental and aesthetic characteristics like the one studied here.[16]

The harmonious fusion of exquisite graphic form and select textual content makes calligraphic specimens like the one analysed here singular pieces. Their innovative study requires precise tools and methodologies from the fields of codicology, palaeography, the social history of manuscript culture, and even retrospective graphic design. In any case, it seems reasonable to establish a study concept based on such parameters as the intentionality, the authors or previous calligraphic models that served as inspiration, the variety and quality of types of writing reproduced, the materiality of the copy, the design processes, the preparation and subsequent execution, as well as the significance and the specific value of this contribution. All these issues are addressed and explained in a compact and remarkable way in the introduction signed by Simon Jervis.

Abecedarium sive alphabetum: A required matter of terminology

Eberhard König posed one of the fundamental questions about this type of manual in his 2015 study of another famous 'ABC book', Mary of Burgundy's calligraphy book: What was the intention behind their production? What were they exactly? Books for learning exemplary writing? Graphic embellishment of moralistic texts? *Schreibmeisterbücher*? Books with just different types of fashionable alphabets? In short, books for learning to read or books for learning to write?[17]

[14] Navarro and Alonso 2022.

[15] Quenzer 2021.

[16] Günther and Ludwig 1994.

[17] König 2015.

We could also add a pair of complementary questions: Can these calligraphic pieces be considered hybrid artefacts meant to foster the reading of pious and morally uplifting texts through an exquisite original medium, one-of-a-kind pieces in contrast (or rather, in coexistence) to the mass production brought about by the revolutionary advent of the modern printing press already studied by Elizabeth Eisenstein?

From a perspective focused on the Social History of written culture and as a result of the complexity and richness of the so called 'ABC Books', a deeper analysis and terminological clarification of these typologies in the introduction would have been recommendable. Compilations and studies like those directed by Bernard Farkas[18] or even past exhibitions on these materials provide complementary perspectives to understand their historical significance[19]: 'Before the invention of printing, manuscript *abecedaria* were primers used for teaching children the alphabet and elementary rules of spelling and grammar. Their use became more widespread when printed versions appeared. The term could also be used figuratively for certain kinds of discourse, such as Francis Bacon´s philosophical treatise *Abecedarium novum naturae*, in which a subject was, as it were, surveyed from A to Z'. This definition provided by Peter Beal can serve to illustrate, precisely, the supposed learning and scholar purpose assigned to these materials in origin, but above all the evolution, reformulation and hybridization of any handwritten or printed work comprised under the generic label of 'ABC Books'.[20]

Naturally, the in-depth study and the later evolution of the 'Alphabet' or 'ABC' Books must have been originally embedded in a pedagogical and early literacy learning tradition. This is a topic widely studied in numerous treatises dealing with the history of writing and reading, as well as in general overviews on the history of education. Without completely losing its original pedagogical function, the term 'ABC Book' will have gradually included other meanings, as indicated, for example, by graphic and formal differences that do not always correspond to the primary school education or the originally intended target audience.

Maybe Amos Lewis knew or even handled titles like this anonymous *An A,B,C. wyth a cathechisme, that is to saye, an instruction to be learned* […] printed in London in 1551, or this *An A,B,C. for children here is an A,B,C, deuised with sillables, with the pater noster, the creed & the ten commaundments in English* […], also printed in London, in 1570. In the case of Amos Lewis's Alphabet Book, we suggest that its possible educational purpose for children or young people has not been completely obscured. However, it is surpassed by the calligraphic design and the high aesthetic and formal weight, which is rather oriented towards self-promotion through a handwritten work that already shows the transition to Baroque culture (Fig. 2).

[18] Farkas 2018.

[19] Havekost and Klattenhoff 1982.

[20] Beal 2008.

Fig. 2: Lucas Kilian (*1579–1637*), *Newes ABC Büechlein* [. . .], [S.l.], 1627. HAB Wolfenbüttel, A: 36.16 Geom. 2° (11), <http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/36-16-geom-2f-11s/start.htm> (accessed on 20 May 2025). Original CC BY-SA 4.0 License.

But also, thanks to ALAB's typological variety of scripts with their scriptural nomenclature heading some of the sheets, it is reasonable to think of it as a sampler, more of an *ad maiorem gloriam* catalogue of the author than a textbook.

In contrast to the leitmotiv of learning the fundamentals of scriptural perfection through manuals, treatises, and didactically-oriented works highlighted by recent publications – like the one entitled *Schnörkel, Rüssel, Gänsekiel* on the writing manuals conserved at the Bibliothek der Franckeschen Stiftungen in Halle – the formal beauty of ALAB does not share exactly the same objectives.[21] It displays neither normative intentions nor a series of instructions, procedures or *regulae* for understanding the ductus of each letter type executed. This distinguishes it from the *artes scribendi* which since medieval times have served as the necessary precursors of modern calligraphy classifications.

Unlike the multiple manuals and arts of writing printed all over Europe (which Jervis reviews on pages 9 to 25 in the bibliographic tradition of scholars like A.S Osley or Stanley Morison), it is clear that Amos Lewis's manuscript is unrelated to this purpose characterised by its systematic construction of rules, models, and propositions for the structured learning of writing and its multiple script types or variants to meet the requirements imposed by the modern state's growing 'logic of writing', as pointed out previously by Jack Goody and Michael Clanchy.[22]

As the history of handwriting virtuosity has shown, the demand for expert scribes dealing with 'script versatility' engendered a strong competitive spirit among 'writing masters' throughout Europe, even leading to famous contests such as the well-known *Prix de la Plume couronnée* in the Netherlands, and episodes of bitter animosity or rivalry between calligraphers (for instance Peter Bales against William Panke in England, only a few years after Amos Lewis finished his Alphabet Book).[23] ALAB is firmly ensconced in the tradition of drawing a series of samples to demonstrate calligraphic skills which were collected for commercial, self-promotional, aesthetic-artistic reasons, or a combination of all of them.

[21] Gröschl and Kahlow 2019.

[22] Goody 1986, Clanchy 2013.

[23] Van Uchelen 1976, Thadani 2013, Strange 1897.

It is well known that 'alphabet books' like the one by Amos Lewis were intended to serve as objects that transcended their mere graphic function. The uniqueness and preciousness of these books were also outstanding gifts in the tradition of the *captatio benevolentiae* and a way for writing teachers and calligraphers to enter courtly environments, enjoy a certain degree of protection and patronage, and gain proximity to political decision-making circles. They often applied their administrative competence as secretaries, archivists, and even children's tutors, while exploiting powerful patrons' general taste for refined art.[24] As Jervis explains, exhibiting the product of writing ability to achieve the goal of promotion in the social hierarchy or acceptance within a generally closed community is also behind the motivations that (unsuccessfully) drove Amos Lewis. To this environment of bureaucratic adroitness, we can also add that the *cursus honorum* of the ubiquitous private secretaries, who exercised their profession in noble houses or contributed their abilities to the prosperity of powerful businessmen, alternated their high technical calligraphic skills with their ability to manage all kind of internal affairs. That included the formal expertise and mastery of the contents and diplomatic structure of several standard types of documents described in other 'writing manuals': the very common 'modern secretaries' or models of letters for all occasions, as studied by Erdmann, Govi and Govi,[25] Stewart, and Wolfe in the case of Renaissance England.[26]

Calligraphic artefacts and socio-cultural interactions

It is, therefore, essential to take a moment to examine Jervis's introduction to ALAB, where one vital aspect of codicological analysis and material bibliography, the so-called 'fortune of the volume', relates transmissions and changes of ownership, and the aforementioned search for patronage. Indeed, this manuscript cannot be understood without considering the existence of Sir John Petre, Knight and High Sheriff of Essex, to whom it is dedicated. Of great interest are the results of research into Sir John's father, William Petre (*c.*1505–1572, portrait at the National Portrait Gallery, London), Chancellor of the Order of the Garter, whose activity as principal secretary of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Queen Mary, as well as an official counsellor of Elizabeth I and friend of the secretary William Cecil, reflects the environments of refined bureaucracy and daily contact with scriptural practice at the most consequential political level. Some of the dedications of the texts in this alphabet book refer to William, John Petre's son, born in 1575. This detail suggests that this piece could be one of the usual calligraphic models (but not exactly manuals) in which children and young people at the highest rungs of society could admire and learn to imitate the fashionable scripts, on the one hand, and practice reading passages of a moralising nature, on the other.

Conclusively, Jervis states (p. 6) that 'ALAB is an eloquent window into aspects of: patronage, literacy, ornament, education'. This characterisation proposes an interrelation between the European theoretical models that served as inspiration for Amos Lewis and his effective calligraphic practice. Moreover, it is a demonstration that showcases the author's calligraphic talent in a calculated

[24] Gonzalo 2006.

[25] Erdmann, Govi, and Govi 2014.

[26] Stewart and Wolfe 2004.

approach to seek support and patronage to attract clients in need of the art of writing, or to impress potential supporters, something that was not uncommon in other latitudes. It is widely known that since medieval times, writing masters would create *Schreibmeisterblätter* (such as those studied by Carl Wehmer), advertising sheets, notebooks, and categorised standard letter types that were reproduced in copybooks that circulated in manuscript form with different samples of handwritings for various purposes and daily applications.[27]

All of them are well known and take us from such works as the *Forma scribendi* of Hugo of Spechtshart (1346),[28] the *Modus scribendi* of the Abbey of Melk (fifteenth century),[29] the *Tractatus in omnem modum scribendi* (fifteenth century)[30] or the *Compendium* of the University of Prague Library (fifteenth century)[31] to the *Ars scribendi* of the notary Gabriel Altadell (*c.*1468) or the *Ars letteraria* of Hartmann Schedel, both studied by Francisco Gimeno Blay.[32] In the mid-fifteenth century, the famous *Proba centum scripturarum diversarum* would be one of the most notable calligraphic displays, with each letter type named, by the monk Leonhard Wagner (1454–1522).[33] Starting in the sixteenth century, interest in these samples held in both public and private collections rises and intensifies in terms of providing the morphology of the main types of writing that define European manuscript culture. Works by authors such as Gregorius Bock (*Scribal Pattern Book*, *c.*1510-1517), Johann Holtman (*Alphabet with human faces and animals*, 1529), Alonso Martín del Canto (*Art of writing all forms and genres of letters*, 1544), preceding that of Yciar by four years,[34] share calligraphic virtuosity and the promotional function with other handwriting samplers such as that of Jaime Guiral de Valenzuela (*c.*1550) (Fig. 3), the alphabet book by Antonio Rodríguez (1599), as well as later ones, such as the *Formas de letras* on parchment by Tomás Solórzano preserved in the collection Del Olmo & Vilas (1632–1633) (Fig. 4), that of Marcos Fernández de las Roelas (1703) (Fig. 7), or the *Collection of all forms of letters, both ancient and modern...*, (1769) by Antonio de Huerta, among many others also conserved in the Spanish National Library.

Inspirations, presences and absences across borders

Regarding graphic models and works that could have served as direct inspiration to Amos Lewis, in the introduction Jervis details a deep connection with the *Libellus* of the Swiss writing master Urban Wyss (Zurich, 1549). In addition to Wyss, the second source of inspiration was the treatise of John de Beau Chesne and John Baildon, the first book of writing models printed in England (London, 1570). It should be remembered that within his influential calligraphic oeuvre, between

[27] Wehmer 1946.

[28] Steinberg 1940–1941.

[29] Bischoff 1939, Morison and Bischoff 1940.

[30] Gasparri 1979.

[31] Palm 1865.

[32] Gimeno 1993, Gimeno 2019.

[33] Wehmer 1963.

[34] Martínez 2004.

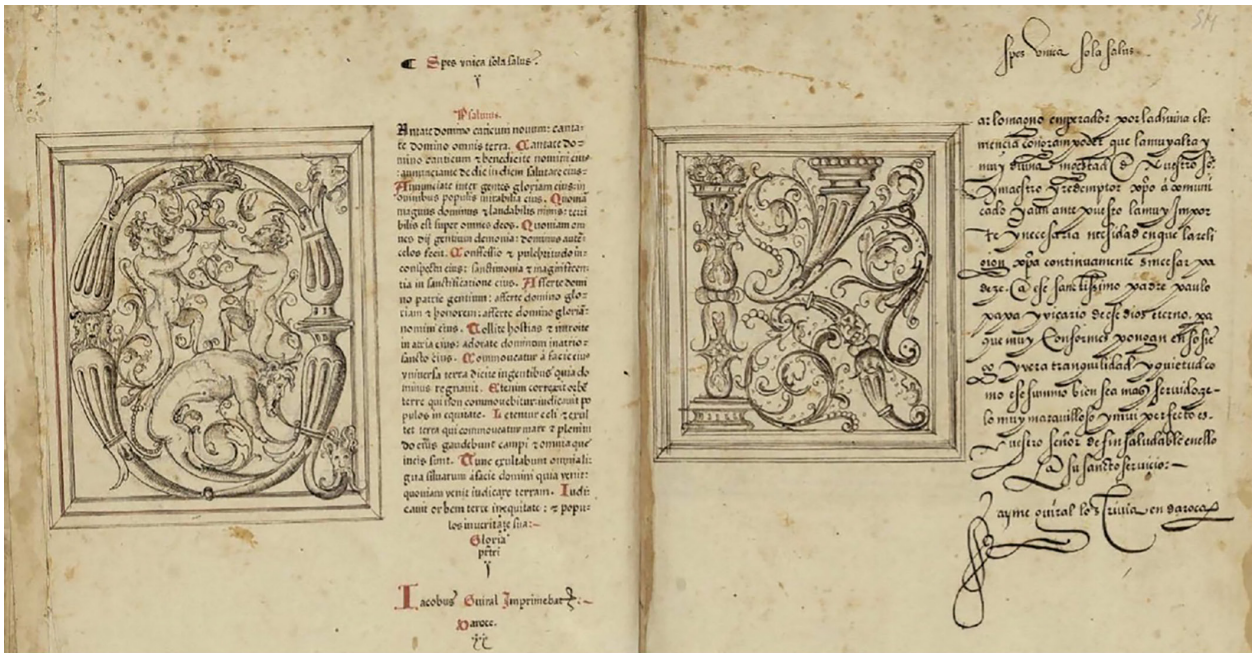

Fig. 3: Jaime Guiral de Valenzuela, *Arte de escribir*, *c.*1550. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MSS/9923. Available at: BNE, Biblioteca Digital Hispánica, <https://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000050824&page=1> (accessed on 20 May 2025). Public domain, CC BY 4.0.

Fig. 4: Tomás de Solórzano, *Formas de letra*, 1632–1633, Madrid, Imprenta Municipal – Artes del Libro. Del Olmo & Vilas Collection. Reproduced with permission.

the *Libellus* (1549) and *Ein neuw Fundamentbuch* (1562), Urban Wyss wrote the less well-known *Cantzleysch Tittelbuch* (1553), a work oriented exclusively towards the learning of the two essential writing morphologies in their geographical and chronological framework, *Kanzleischrift* and *Fraktur*, which was also published in a facsimile edition (1979).[35]

[35] Wyss 1553.

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The importance and influence of the *Libellus*, not only for Amos Lewis but also for other central European calligraphers and ones based in Bern, such as the notary Jakob Hutzli, is a topic that was amply covered years ago by Christian Rubi.[36] This is just one example, among many, that reinforces the interrelation with European humanism that encouraged the systematic learning of writing and its embellished features following the tradition of learning letter types through samples with texts, adages, moralising sentences, passages from classic works, etc.

By the year this 'alphabet book' was finished (probably 1585), we note that it had been approximately fifteen years since the aforementioned Jean de Beau Chesne and John Baildon had printed their *A Booke containing* […], whereas the pamphlet by William Panke was printed in 1591.[37] Jervis includes a review of the environment of calligraphic production in England in the fifteenth century, with detailed information about authors, reception of works, and dominant letter types in the manuscript culture of Renaissance England. The list of strictly English calligraphic pieces starts with other earlier English manuscript pattern and alphabet books, such as the Sloane MS 1448a (*c.*1450),[38] *The Macclesfield Alphabet Book* (*c.*1475–1525),[39] and the so called 'Jones Manuscript' (*c.*1540s–1560s).[40] Secondly, the list of authors specialising in handwritten works, such as the Italian soldier and calligrapher Petruccio Ubaldini (*c.*1524–*c.*1600) who entered the service of the English crown, the renowned Ester Inglis (*c.*1571–*c.*1624), or Joseph Lawson, who wrote *Pennarum Nitor* (1608) is a good framework in which to place ALAB, as are several treatises and printed manuals of beautiful writing that flourished throughout Europe and had been promoted since the beginning of the century by mainly Italian authors.

Along with the early printed writing books in England, Jervis cites the most recognised authors and titles in Italy, Germany, France, and other countries, also mentioning a dearth of Spanish books. His overview of the Spanish authors and calligraphic influences needs to be reformulated. Apart from one reference to the ubiquitous Juan de Ycíar, there is no evidence of any presence or influence in England of the prolific Spanish authors that preceded and followed Ycíar. Nevertheless, Spanish calligraphic print production during the sixteenth century provides notable examples of these treatises and manuals that must also be taken into account. In addition to Ycíar, Jervis's list should include Pedro Madariaga (1565), Francisco Lucas (1571, 1577, 1580) (Fig. 5), Andrés Brun (1583), the curious *Colección de Muestras de varias letras, grabadas en madera* (*Collection of* [printed] *samples of different letters*) by Ordóñez de Villaquirán (1583) (Fig. 6), Juan de la Cuesta (1589), and Ignacio Pérez (1599).

[36] Rubi 1988.

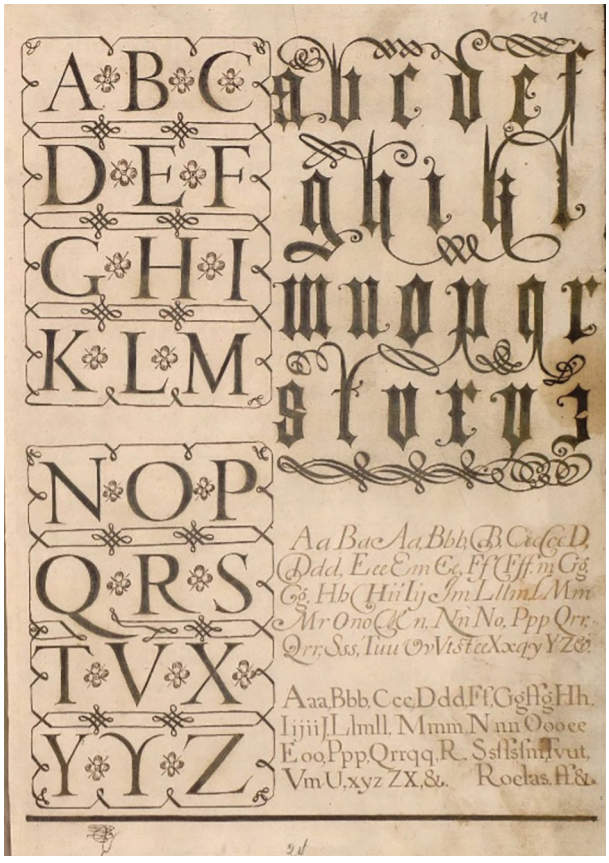
[37] Panke, 1591, Thadani 2013.

[38] *Alphabet Book*, England, *c.*1450. London, British Library, Sloane MS 1448A.

[39] *The Macclesfield Alphabet Book*, East Anglia, *c.*1475–1525. London, British Library, Add. MS 88887.

[40] *Writing book, with four sets of alphabets*, England, *c.*1540s–1560s. London, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, MSL/1937/2090.

Fig. 5: Francisco Lucas, *Arte de escrevir* [. . .], Madrid, Francisco Sánchez, 1580. Private collection.



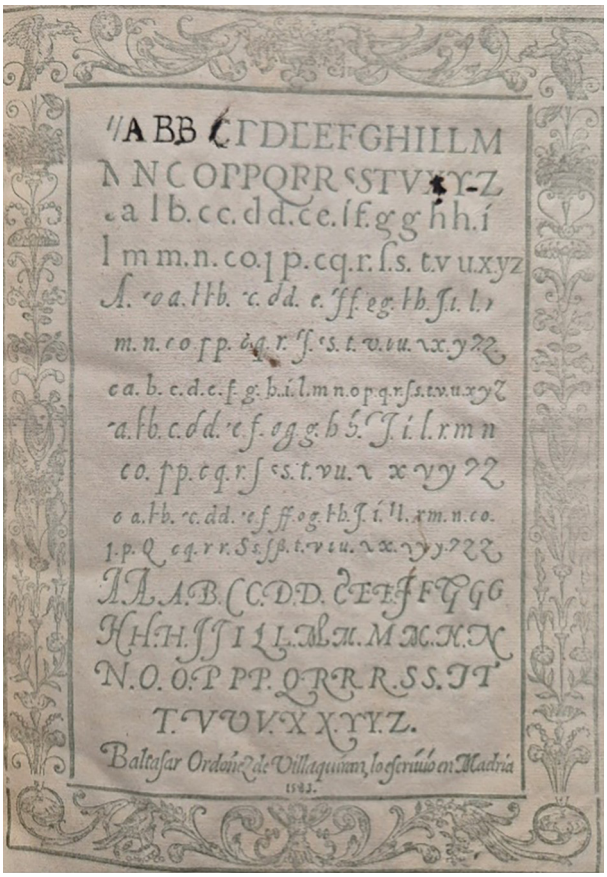


Fig. 6: Baltasar Ordóñez de Villaquirán, [*Colección de Muestras de varias letras, grabadas en madera*], Madrid, 1583. Printed sheets with samples of 'Bastard' script to be presumably overwritten at school with ink: a kind of 'triumph of Renaissance *imitatio*'. Madrid, BNE, R/8980-R/8981. Public Domain. Image from the BNE Collections.

Fig. 7: Marcos Fernández de las Roelas, [*Cuaderno de caligrafía*], 1703. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MSS/22844. Available at: BNE, Biblioteca Digital Hispánica <https://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000188132&page=1>. Public domain, CC BY 4.0.

Appearance, scripts exuberance and contents

One of the longest sections of the introduction written by Jervis is focused on material features, decoration and aesthetic description. In fact, he devotes special comments to the motifs and patterns of the general borders, heraldry, etc., as well as to the different variations of flourishes, frames and mouldings that accompany each sheet of the manuscript, which also heighten its interest for scholars of Elizabethan embroidery.

With respect to the modest characteristics of the manuscript, it must be remarked that ALAB is comprised of 30 folios assembled in a 'small landscape' format, following the oblong tradition of the Italian writing books and, compared to other contemporary European calligraphic specimens, its appearance is beautiful but not exceptional. Taking a look inside, the reader discovers that it is uncompleted. Indeed, traces of pencil sketches are still visible, and the last letter of the alphabet is a pencilled draft version. This unfinished condition also opens the door to studies directly linked to the writing process and the organisation of the different phases of preparation and final execution of the original. In Jervis's particular hypothesis, it was precisely this circumstance of being an unfinished copy that saved the ALAB from further deterioration, as it does not seem to have entered any classroom or learning circuit where it would have been subjected to heavier use that would have left marks or even resulted in deterioration or irreversible loss.

Again, and despite the title, it should also be noted that this ALAB does not include a single complete alphabet/*abécédaire* of the different types of writing shown and named in the manuscript. Of greatest interest for calligraphic and even palaeographic analysis is everything related to the varied letter types used throughout the volume. A classic graphic hierarchy is followed, starting each folio with the capital letters in square frames and alphabetical sequence. These capitals are directly influenced by printed exemplars, something that is especially clear in the case of Geoffrey Tory (1529) and Thomas Geminus (1548). This represents a thought-provoking contribution to knowledge about the reception, use, and influence of printed calligraphic treatises as mirrors, sources, or models for calligraphers and practitioners. Amos Lewis's capitals are, as Jervis suggests, 'the most prominent features of his book, signalled modernity and a linkage to Renaissance Typography'. A dialogue is thus established between handwritten and typographic models in dynamic interaction. Twenty-five types of writing styles or scripts are reproduced. On p. 42, Jervis indicates that Greek and Hebrew characters, as well as the cyphers of the cryptographic systems themselves, are omitted from the analysis.

The traditional palaeographic controversy surrounding an internationally normalised and accepted nomenclature of scripts in the history of Western handwriting aside, Lewis's work contains examples of Roman, Secretary, 'Frizee' Italic, Bastard, Court, Chancery, Italic, etc. Some others are impractical or well outside the general calligraphic canon, with a certain tendency to overuse of the so called 'facing left and reversed letters', another reason to think of the admiration and eventual patronage of Sir John Petre he pursued.

In addition to these relevant topics, it is necessary to highlight that Jervis has also paid well-deserved attention to the textual content in the very useful notes, transcriptions and translations that can be found in the facsimile. Many of the texts reproduced in the ALAB are in Latin, almost all of

them proverbs, without any having a specifically Christian origin, unlike several contemporaneous treatises which frequently reproduced biblical passages. This selection of texts seems to suggest Lewis's emphasis on his secular didactic credentials.

A final consideration on the forms of handwritten or printed transmission of these materials in modern Europe may serve to conclude. In fact, the possibility of an eventual printing of ALAB, a materially and economically costly endeavour for Lewis, remains an open question. As was the case with many other calligraphic specimens conserved in libraries and archives around the world, these unique works were consciously circulated in manuscript form underscoring their singularity and originality. Both are demonstrated in Jervis's attractive and balanced edition which takes its place alongside other recent contributions to the study of early modern European penmanship.

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Manuscripts

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An, A,B,C. wyth a cathechisme, that is to saye, an instruction to be learned of euerye chylde before he be brought to be confyrmed of thee bysshoppe sette forth by thee Kings Maiestye ; wherevnto [sic] is also ioyned the letany and suffrages wyth certayne graces to be sayde at dyner and supper, London, Edwarde Whytchurch, 1551.

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