

A SCRIBE'S TOOLS

What writing instruments did scribes use? How have they changed over time?



Explore

Pause and look closely at the writing tools, or instruments, in the image above. Which of these can you identify?

The image shows writing instruments used in Turkey about 300 years ago. They were used by scribes, or people whose job was to copy letters, books and other documents by hand. These tools include scissors, a ruler, a pen case, an inkwell and pen rests. But these are not ordinary tools like we see today. They are made of steel and brass, and decorated with expensive materials like gold, silver, ivory, and turquoise. At this time, beautiful handwriting and calligraphy was one of the highest forms of art in the Islamic world. And it was believed that beautiful writing tools would produce beautiful writing!

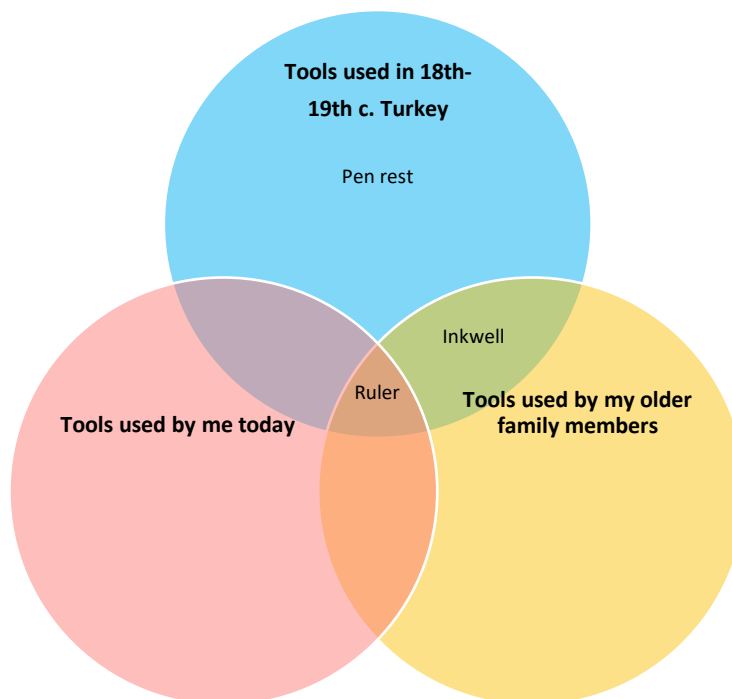
Click [here](#) to explore more details about the writing tools shown above.

Record History like a Scribe

Over the years, the tools we use to write and decorate our books have changed. Can you investigate and record this change? Get ready to put on your historian hat and grab your scribal tools!

Collect your own writing instruments in your home, like ballpoint pens, mechanical pencils, erasers, staplers etc. Can you write down a list of all your writing tools? Then, ask your older family members, like parents and grandparents, what writing tools they used when they were young. Put down a list of all these instruments too!

How are your parents' writing instruments different from yours? How are their tools different from or similar to the ones used by the scribes in Turkey? Put down your lists into the **Venn diagram** below and discover these similarities and differences. Remember to note down common instruments in the areas where the circles of the diagram meet (shaded in green, purple, orange and brown)! Share your completed diagram with us at: learn@agakhanmuseum.org.



What is a Venn diagram?

A Venn diagram shows the relationship between different groups of things, focusing on what is common and different in these groups. Look at the examples above: rulers are common between all three groups, while inkwells are common only between two groups as they were used by our grandparents and in Turkey hundreds of years ago but are not used by us anymore.

Image: Scribal Implements, Turkey, 18th - 19th centuries, Mixed materials and techniques, Length (max.) 28.8 cm, AKM622.1-13