Siyah Mashq is to be compared to an orchestra of musicians practising scales on different instruments prior to the actual performance. The same tone is repeated over and over, aiming to reach the optimum sound. As the vocalist clears his voice, the calligrapher loosens his hand, and it becomes clear through these exercise folios how far he is from the performing stage.

Siyah Mashq gained popularity during the 18th and 19th centuries as mystical folios with hidden messages that required a pure heart to decipher. It acquired a strange sense of fluidity and grace, reflecting a panegyric composition. Throughout the folios one can hear the voice of the calligrapher, hymning the words which he knows by heart.

Shikasteh is the apogee of the scripts when it comes to orchestrating a performance. The folios radiate with movement in all directions, some in the form of circles and spirals, others radiate from the centre and spread outwards. (1998.2.87). Some are simple short phrases, softly written in two planes in different colours (1998.2.97), while some folios are vibrant, full of life, demonstrating the use of many musical instruments, as if the conductor's baton transforms into a reed pen on the folios. (1998.2.242, 231).

Rhythm & Verses presents a vibrant collection of single folios, to appreciate not only as two-dimensional representations, but radiating with rhythms, movement and vivacity. Throughout the folios we invite the viewer to join the calligraphers, and learn to read the musical scores and to view the letters as sounds of instruments, listening to each other, working together to produce masterpieces. It may be the whirling of the dervishes that inspired the calligraphers, or it may be the leaping of their body that inspired the slanting of the letters, yet it is certainly devotion that kept the calligrapher inspired.

My songs gave eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf,
Set the critics flapping like night birds,
Set me at rest all night in my bed
And pay me well if I write you a 'praise'.
The flatterers will come to you mouthing it
So desert every voice but mine,
For I am the singing lark, the rest are only echo
Time is my scribe and my register
It follows me,... singing the words I drop.

Al Mutanabbi
(translated by Herbert Howarth and Ibrahim Shukrallah)
Four different movements of the Shikasteh script
Naskh and Riqqa

Naskh and Riqqa were the earliest cursive scripts to be used in Iran for religious texts, official documentation and epic poetry. Under the Abbasid caliphs, Riqqa developed as the script most favoured by the royal family. It was used to inscribe their signatures and titles, found in manuscripts as well as in the minor arts commissioned by the court. In Persia, the Riqqa script retained its status as the script used for the calligrapher's signature in the colophon of Qur'ans and religious texts.

The Naskh script, whose beauty developed in Baghdad up to the 13th century, witnessed a revival during the 18th century in Iran under the guidance of calligrapher Ahmed Nairizi. Ahmed al Nairizi resided in Isfahan and was awarded the surname Sultani by the Shah Sultan Hussein (1682-1739), during which time he produced some of the masterpieces of Persian calligraphy in Naskh style. During Nairizi's period, Naskh was confined to the copying of religious texts and inscribing the Qur'an.

The IAMM collection displays folios of elegant Naskh and Riqqa scripts. All the single folios are in Arabic and contain Qur'anic verses, religious texts, prophetic Hadiths, tales, advices, aphorisms and wise sayings of Caliph Ali. The IAMM collection displays a folio of the 15th century master calligrapher Mahmud al Nishapuri, and includes folios of Mirza Atmeh al Nairizi dating from the early eighteenth century, representing key stages of his life.

Mahmud al Nishapuri's finished folios were considered to express the true Iranian Naskh with its powerful homogeneous strokes that float throughout the lines. The collection also presents the works of Mohammed Hashim and Mohammed Salih dating from the late 18th century, Mohammed Shafe and Mohammed Ismail from the early nineteenth century and Mohammed Mohsen, Zay al Abedin and Mohammed Badile al Hamadani from the mid-nineteenth century. The latter's calligraphy demonstrates the range of beauty and finesse that can be achieved through the Naskh script.
Verses from the Holy Qur’an
Surah al Imran; verses 18, 19 & 26

Calligrapher: Mohammed Shafie Al Tabrizi
Date: 1818 AD
Style: Arabic in Naskh style
Size: 10.7 x 19.0 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.5

Description

The black Naskh script is written within cloud-shaped compartments outlined in black on gilded natural wood. Three lines are placed horizontally in the folio, alternating with two rows of diagonally written words. The folio is framed with a white border adorned with a gold foliate pattern.

The selected verses of the Qur’an have been dedicated to a friend of the calligrapher, namely Mohammed Rahim. The calligrapher is known as Shafi Al Tabrizi, son of Mirza Mohammed Ali Kushnervi who worked all through the 19th century in Tabriz and is responsible for two other folios within the IAMM collection. Mohammed Shafie signed another folio in the Khalili collection on a similar wooden background. (Bayani, 1345-58, IV, p.163-5-catalogue number 166, p.221)

Surah al Imran; verses 18, 19 & 26

“Verse 18: There is no god but He: That is the witness of Allah, His angels, and those endued with knowledge, standing firm on justice. There is no god but He, the Exalted in Power, the Wise.
Verse 19: The Religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His Will): Nor did the People of the Book dissent therefrom except through envy of each other, after knowledge had come to them. But if any deny the Signs of Allah, Allah is swift in calling to account.
Verse 26: Say: ‘O Allah, Lord of Power (And Rule), Thou givest power to whom Thou pleasest, and Thou stripest off power from whom Thou pleasest: Thou enduest with honor whom Thou pleasest, and Thou bringest low whom Thou pleasest: In Thy hand is all good. Verily, over all things Thou hast power.’
**Surah al Fatihah**

**Calligrapher:** Mohammed Shafie al Tabrizi  
**Date:** 1219 AH / 1804 AD  
**Style:** Arabic in *Naskh* style  
**Size:** 16.3 x 11.6 cm  
**Accession number:** 1998.2.180

**Description**

This signed folio of Mohammed Shafie represents the early stages of the calligrapher's life, when he followed a more traditional composition. The text comprises the complete surah of al Fatihah and part of the surah al Kawthar. These specific surahs must have indicated a formula to achieve holy blessings known to Iran. The script is in *Naskh* while the signature is in *Riqqa*, giving Mohammed Shafie a chance to show his mastery of other scripts.

**Text**

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful  
Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds,  
The Beneficent, the Merciful.  
Master of the Day of Judgment  
Thee (alone) do we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help.  
Guide us on the straight path,  
The path of those on whom Thou hast bestowed  
Thy Grace,  
Not (the path) of those who earn thine anger nor of those who go astray.
Wise sayings presented in a Lavha style

Catalogue no. 3

Calligrapher: Ibn Malik, Muhammad Ahmed Mohsen

Date: 1239 AH / 1814 AD

Style: Arabic in Naskh, signature in Riqqa'

Size: 8.1 x 11.6 cm

Accession number: 1998.2.6

Description

The single folio is presented as a decorative panel, or lavha, and was intended to adorn the walls of a home or a pious foundation. It consists of two large lines of black Naskh written within faded cloud-shaped compartments against a gold ground. The last line where the signature of the calligrapher Muhammad Ahmed Mohsen Ibn Malik and the date 1814 are inscribed, is written in Riqqa’ style. In many cases such wise sayings were transmitted through Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib.

The beauty of the meanings of the words inscribed in the couplet indicates an intellectual milieu where the deeper meanings of the Arabic words were understood. The word "Adab", which means discipline, is also understood in literary term as belles lettres. It was translated as frahang in middle Persian and was used as culture and good conduct in ethical and social conduct.(Frye, 1975, p.20)

Text

ادب الامرء خير من ذهبه
ادب عربك تتفهم
في كمال الاستعجال نهاية السرعة
ابن ملك محمد احمد محسن في سنة
1231 من الهجره

The inscription reads as follows:

"The discipline of the human being is better than his gold.
The discipline of your dependents is beneficial for them."
The folio displays a horizontal and diagonal arrangement of wise sayings and prophetic hadith. In three horizontal lines followed by 10 diagonal shorter lines, the words incisive a tone change. Several letters are further elongated, prolongating the manner in which they are to be recited.

The second section includes a hadith: “from the sayings of the last of the prophets, Mohammed ﷺ: Those who believe in God and the day of resurrection should be generous to their guest, be generous to their neighbour”. The text continues with incomplete wise sayings by Caliph Ali. The text was written on a Monday in the month of Ramadan.