Shikasteh
The Shikasteh described as the 'broken' script, developed and flourished in Iran during the sixteenth to seventeenth century AD. It is an elegant yet legible script that appears broken as the letters join together due to the swiftness of the calligrapher's hand. The script was initially developed for official documents yet became more famous as a decorative composition than for official proclamations. In time, the Shikasteh revealed its mystical beauties and became regulated. According to Qadi Ahmed, his father Mir Munshi Hussein wrote the Shikasteh script, yet its master developer was Sayid Shaf'a (c. 1085 AH / 1675 AD) under the patronage of Murtada Quli Khan Shamlu, the governor of Herat.

A century later, Dervish Abdul Majid Taliqani (1185 AH / 1741-2 AD) became the master of the Shikasteh style. Dervish Abdul Majid in numerous folios gives himself the title of Shikasteh nigar or the Shikasteh writer. The Shikasteh script developed out of Nasta'liq and it had a set of complex rules, in which shorthand-like symbols were employed. In time the rules were disregarded and more freedom was given to the artist to produce an independent impression. Ghobar Shikasteh developed as a style of writing in minute size. However, it was never appropriate for the copying of the Holy Qur'an. Shikasteh is one of the most distinctive contributions to the world of Islamic calligraphy.

According to Sultan Ali Mashhadi, (d. 924 AH / 1519 AD)
the requirement for fine calligraphy was:

"Ink as black as the calligrapher's fortune (misfortune),
A pen which is as restless as the eyes that shed tears,
And a spirit as elegant as the khatt, (down/script) of a beautiful friend".
A calligrapher's letter

Calligrapher: Dervish Abdul Majid Talighani
Date: 1170-1185 AH / 1757-1771 AD
Style: Shikasteh
Size: 16.7 x 9.3 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.71

Description

The letter was written by Dervish Abdul Majid Talighani to his friend calligrapher Mirza Abdul Wahab. The folio depicts eight horizontal lines as well as more writings upside down in black text written within cloud-shaped compartments. The calligraphy creates a frame to the folio which is mounted on a board with polychrome floral border. The text mentions the period of the execution of the folio to be at the end of the month of Ramadhan, and the purpose was to inform his friend that he would not be able to complete a document. Abdul Majid accordingly recommends that the friend (as a sign of great confidence in his skillful hand) finishes the job. Abdul Majid further adds that some of the calligraphy folios he had collected became wet and had been destroyed.
Wise sayings

Calligrapher: Dervish Abdul Majid Talighani
Date: 1171-1185 AH / 1757-1771 AD
Style: Shikasteh
Size: 19.8 x 15.7 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.87

Description

The beauty of Shikasteh script style is in its free-flowing arrangement of short verses. Here the composition reaches out from the centre as if it were flocks of birds flying in the sky, conquering their space and penetrating the whispering sound of the wind. Talighani was a master Shikasteh calligrapher, who in this folio broke away from the more traditional compositions and allowed his hand to spontaneously innovate. The scattered words within the folio indicate it was intenced as a letter. It was signed by Al Katio al Fagir (the poor scribe) Abdul Majid in Isfahan.
Catalogue no. 73

A poem

Calligrapher: Dervish Abdul Majid Talighani
Date: 1757-1771
Style: Shikasteh Nasta’liq
Size: 12.1 x 6.7 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.67

Description

The folio depicts 11 couplets creating an ascending and descending arrangement in black Shikasteh against a gilded background. The gold background is decorated with bouquets of flowers in black, a motif that replaced the Chinese cloud scrolls and the arabesque foliages during the 18th century in Iran. Talighani was sensitive to the manner in which the couplets should be recited and accordingly kept each two stanzas close to each other, producing a distinct melody to the folio.
A poem

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Calligrapher:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
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<td>Style:</td>
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<tr>
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<td>16.2 x 11.8 cm</td>
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Description

Nineteen couplets arranged in four rows creating a simple harmonious movement to the folio. The background, with its floral design against a gold ground, adds to the dense composition. The arrangement of the Shikasteh short verse used to adhere to an order, and the more traditional compositions, as in this folio, perhaps indicate a less confident calligrapher.
**Catalogue no 75**

**Words of praise and admiration; Madh**

- **Calligrapher:** Unknown
- **Date:** 1131 AH / 1719 AD
- **Style:** Shikasteh Nasta’liq
- **Size:** 16.8 x 9.8 cm
- **Accession number:** 1998.2.118

**Description**

This is a single folio of black text written in a curved diagonal, with gold foliate scrolls elegantly separating each line, and small red bosses separating each verse. The overall appearance of the folio is a free-flowing rhythmic composition that is of superb quality aesthetically. The harmonious manner in which the illuminator-calligrapher created an interaction between the leaf scrolls and the text can only be attributed to a master artist of the royal ateliers of Isfahan.
Catalogue no. 76

A letter

Calligrapher: Unknown
Date: c. 18th century
Style: Shikasteh
Size: 16.2 x 12.2 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.63

Description

The folio depicts a letter written to an Imam, concerning an engagement. The Imam replies on the same folio, refusing the writer's request and criticising the writer's grammar and spelling. The decoration is unique as it depicts bouquets of multicoloured flowers.
Catalogue no. 77

A single folio of Persian poetry

Calligrapher: Mirza Kochuk Isfahani
Date: 1805-1825
Style: Shikasteh Nasta’liq
Size: 16.2 x 9.4 cm
Accession number: 1996.2.97

Description

The single folio is framed in gold and red borderlines, and is written in black, gold and cinnabar red text. Six lines display several couplets of poetry in black ink, and upside down are six more lines that display couplets in red and gold. The couplets are all harmoniously divided throughout the folio giving it a superb beauty and displaying a well-balanced composition. In an unconventional manner, colour plays an important role in the overall layout of the rhythmic poems. The satisfaction of the calligrapher is recognised through the careful choice of where to place his signature.
A single folio of poetry

Calligrapher: Mirza Mohammed Qasim
Date: 1217-1223 AH / 1802-1818 AD
Style: Shikasteh Nasta‘liq
Size: 17.5 x 10.5 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.68

Description

In a free-flowing circular manner, the black Shikasteh script is placed within cloud-shaped compartments against a gold background. The script, which is perhaps in Arabic or Turkic, gives the composition a circling motion that is emphasised with the pressure exerted on certain end letters within the text. Typical of the Shikasteh style, the phrases are placed all over the folio with no order. The folio is proudly signed by the calligrapher Mir Mohammed Qasim, who is also known as Mirza Kochuk.