Catalogue no. 96 & 97

*An illegible Siyah Mashq*

**Calligrapher:** Mir Imad  
**Date:** 961-1024 AH / 1592-1611 AD  
**Style:** Siyah Mashq  
**Size:** 31.1 x 20.5 cm, 21.3 x 11.1 cm  
**Accession number:** 1998.2.117, 1998.2.115

**Description**

The two dense folios of script are the exercise work of Mir Imad. He calls them *Muswadda* or blackened, as the folio has been blackened by the extensive writings on top of each other. The outcome is more of a mystical experience to the viewer than a legible text. The text expresses a powerful hand with regular diagonal strokes that create a harmonious sense of movement and rhythm to the folios. The folios are signed by the calligrapher Mir Imad.

"Blackness,  
if you but knew,  
is the light of the Essence;  
To the darkness  
within flows the water of life"

Shams at Din Lahijin  
Gulshan-I-Raz
Catalogue no. 98

Wise sayings

Calligrapher: Asad Allah
Date: 19th century
Style: Siyah Mashq
Size: 16.9 x 9.8 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.147

Description

A diluted black pigment must have been used in the Siyah Mashq folios to save ink. Similarly it is expected that the calligrapher would have examined different angles for cutting the reed pen, and creating different nib sizes. In this folio the decolouration of the ink is visible in the elongated strokes.
Catalogue no. 99

A folio of poetry

Calligrapher: Unknown
Date: c. 19th century
Style: Siyah Mashq
Size: 21.5 x 12.8
Accession number: 1998.2.32

Description

The folio displays black text on green ground adorned with foliate scrolls. The text is written diagonally, right side up and upside down. The final effect is a beautifully arranged and homogeneous text. The text is of a proverbial poem composed by the poet Mawlavi:

"If you want to make friends with an elephant, you should not give him a hole but should instead build a large house."
Wise sayings

Calligrapher: Mirza Mahmud
Date: 19th century
Style: Siyah Mashq
Size: 21.4 x 10.8 cm, 17.2 x 26.8 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.143, 1998.2.140

Description

Two compositions signed by Aqa Mirza Mahmud, in which he test the manoeuvrability of the reed pen. He creates strokes that flow from left to right then curve to flow back from right to left. These movements recall a vocalist who sings the musical scales up and down. In this process both the calligrapher and the soloist halt and keep on repeating a note (letter) till perfection, then resume their exercises.
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**An exercise folio**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calligrapher:</th>
<th>Attributed to Mir Imad</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>c.17th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style:</td>
<td>Siyah Mashq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size:</td>
<td>19.3 x 13.0 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accession number:</td>
<td>1998.2.54</td>
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</tbody>
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**Description**

The single folio of *Siyah Mashq* contains more than 14 lines of repeated letters and words all written within cloud compartments on brownish paper. The repetition of certain letters, such as “Y” and “Mir” may suggest an attribution to Mir Imad, the 17th century calligrapher.
Surah al Fatiha

Calligrapher: Unknown
Date: c. mid 19th century
Style: Nasta'liq in Siyah Mashq
Size: 12.0 x 6.6 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.60

Description

The single folio is on marbled paper in blue and grey on white ground, recording the Surah al Fatiha in seven lines. The calligrapher imitated the script of a deceased Mirza Reza. The calligrapher wrote the Fatiha diagonally and had to repeat several words to reach a perfect outcome. In the process, the calligrapher rendered certain letters in different manners in order to see which of them gave the best flowing effect that he desired. The letter "H" is seen here written in two different manners each giving a different aesthetic effect.
An exercise folio

Calligrapher: Attributed to Mir Imad
Date: c.17th century
Style: Shikasteh Nasta’liq in Siyah Mashq style
Size: 20.0 x 9.8 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.73

Description

A folio that represents the transition between the Shikasteh Nasta’liq style and the dense composition of the Siyah Mashq. The central section displays poems, while the rest of the text is a repetition of letters and words for practice purposes. The purpose of the exercise folios emerged as a method to reach perfection of the calligraphic styles, yet at a later period it started to acquire its own appeal and was considered a mystical representation of words and letters.
A single exercise folio

Calligrapher: Unknown
Date: c. 17th century
Style: Siyah Mashq
Size: 16.5 x 10.6 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.204

Description

The exercise folio is composed of letters and words repeated in a diagonal slant. The ink became smeared and cracked at a later period. Ink preparation was one element of the calligrapher’s training, and its consistency, tone and adhesive quality were among the specifications that needed to be mastered by a calligrapher.
Catalogue no. 105

An exercise folio

Calligrapher: Mohammed Ibrahim
Date: 17th century
Style: Nasta‘lq in Siyah Mashq
Size: 11.7 x 9.7
Accession number: 1998.2.238

Description

The single folio is an exercise panel of the famous calligrapher Mohammed Ibrahim. It includes phrases in Arabic, Persian and the signature of Mir Imad. The folio recalls a wise saying in Arabic: "No dignity accompanies bad manners."

This is an example of folios in which a student copies the work of master calligraphers. Here the work of Mir Imad al Hussaini was copied for practice. The calligrapher imitated his signature and copied the text that accompanied the master's folio, which indicates the month and date of production as being Rabi’ul Awal in Qazvin. This practice was commonly accepted in Iran.
This exercise folio by Mirza Kochuk recalls the following saying:

"Woe, Woe, to a ‘Alem (man of knowledge) who taught then stopped
And worked diligently and innovated then counted
And became prepared if asked, gave advice with every portion a slice and with every totality a meal."

The beauty of this exercise folio is that the poet uses the same words repeated after each other yet each one with a different meaning. The poet made use of the fact that in the Arabic language the articulation above and below letters may totally change the meaning of the words.
Catalogue no. 107

A Mashq mounted within a Muraqqa’

Calligrapher: All
Date: 17th century
Style: Siyah Mashq in a Muraqqa’
Size: 7.3 x 15.2 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.23

Description

The single folio consists of a central Siyah Mashq rectangular panel surrounded by a 19th century calligraphic border. The central panel is a Persian text that refers to good manners. The text is written on a dark decorative ground and refers to itself as Mashq of Ali. The text reads: “if you blood-let, instead of blood all your suffering will come out.”
Catalogue no. 108

Wise sayings
Calligrapher: Mohammed Husseini
Date: 19th century
Style: Siyah Mashq
Size: 20 x 10.5 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.164

Description
This folio is an example of Qur'anic verses being copied for practice. In the process, the calligrapher tried different conjugation methods, different sizes of letters and in line 7 he measured the length of his 'alif' with the Ibn Muqla dotting system, which regulates the proportion between the letters with the use of dots. The folio is signed by 'the slave' Mohammed. Thio text is the first section of verse 97 of Surah al Imran.