Signatures
Biographies

Signatures are the last words a calligrapher inscribes on a folio and the first word the audience looks for. To the calligrapher and artist it is his identity and autobiography, rendered with care and precision in a different script, in a different size and colour to complement the beauty of his work.

Signatures are perhaps the most assertive documentation within a collection of single folios. They indicate the authenticity of the folio, the precise calligrapher’s style development, and his affiliation to a ruler. They also indicate the preference of calligraphers for the subject matter as well as their proficiency in the Arabic language. Furthermore, signatures indicate the preference of the calligrapher’s immediate patron and the fashion of society. The IAMM collection possesses over thirty-five legible signatures, from sixteenth to nineteenth century Iran, some of which are from renowned calligraphers esteemed on the world of Islamic calligraphy for their outstanding contributions.

Signatures have few words around them. They were either praises for the calligrapher or humble attributes such as Fāqir (poor), ‘Abd (slave), Al Muthnib (guilty) or a title such as Ustaz (Professor), Sultan or Dervish (wise man). The Dervish title for example became an expression of personal qualities which were much admired, Qadi Ahmad praised a bookbinder as having the nature of a Dervish. Other titles such as Mir and Mirza are part of the name/title of the calligrapher.

The nisba, or the name of the city with which the calligrapher is affiliated, is usually added at the end of the signature, as for example Mirza Hassan Kirmany, Mohammed Shafi Al Tabrizy, and Muhammad Saleh Al Lu’lu’i al Isfahany. The calligrapher’s nisba may change according to the destination of his employment, and it becomes the pride of the calligrapher to be associated with a royal atelier in the capital city Isfahan. In several cases the signature indicates what type of work is being accomplished, as for example a Muswadda (blackened folio), or Mashq (exercise folio) or katabehu (written by) indicating a finished folio. However, in most cases the name stands alone, proud and self assertive.
Abd al Rashid al Daylami
d. 1638 AD / 1048 AH

A renowned calligrapher who left the Safavid court and went to the Mughal Jahangir's atelier in 1626 AD. He produced masterpieces of Persian calligraphy and augmented the importance of the Nastaliq script in India. He was a student and nephew of Mir Imad. In India he was the head of the Shah Jahan atelier and changed his name to Agha Rashid.

Abd al Latif al Larijani
19th century

Abd al Latif was a calligrapher during Fath Ali Shah's period (1797-1834 AD). He worked for the Qajar ruler and produced a number of beautiful manuscripts. His rendering of Fath Shah's signature on paper was soon transferred to coins.

Abu al Baqa al Musuwi
1027-1100 AH / 1618-1680 AD

Mohammed Abu al Baqa was an important calligrapher in Isfahan. He travelled to India and wrote a famous treatise called "Narabadi". He died in 1100 AH. Mohammed ibn Abu'l Baqa also signed a folio in a Muraqqa' of the Khalili Collection (p.134, no. 66). In that Muraqqa' he signed as "hamaqahu" which means retouched and arranged by him. The signature is similar to the I AMM collection's and is dated to 1027 AH / 1618 AD. Another specimen is found at the Tareq Rajab collection (Safwat, 1997, p.74) and the Read Album Pierpont Morgan Library (Schmitz, cat.no 50).
Abdul Majid
1171-1185 AH / 1740-1771 AD

Dervish Abdul Majid Taligani, was the regulator and true master of the Shikasteh style. He was regarded by contemporary calligraphers as a master of all scripts. He died in Isfahan in 1771. He was proud to describe himself in several folios as a master of Shikasteh negar, or the writer of Shikasteh. He was an active calligrapher during the last 15 years of his life. Some of his work was considered the most important Iranian contribution to the art of calligraphy. These works were called Perso-Arabic and survived as masterpieces all through the 19th century.
Ali Mohammad al Isfahani
19th century

A 19th century calligrapher who excelled in religious texts.

Ahmed al Musuwi ibn Mahdy al Musuwi
19th century

Al Musuwi indicates the origin of the calligrapher, Ahmed, as from the city of Mosul. He was a 19th century calligrapher who signed his name in prominent positions.

Ali Asghar al Hamadani
c. 19th century

Ali Asghar (the young) became in trouble with the court of Shah Tahmasp. He fled to India and joined a renounced atelier. He may also have eloped.
Ahmed al Nairizi
1124-1134 AH / 1712-1722 AD

Ahmed al Nairizi, son of Sultan Mohammed Shams al Din, was a master and progenitor of the Naskh style in 18th century Iran. He wrote prayer books, calligraphic exercises, monumental inscriptions (Chihil Sutun palace, Isfahan), and even painted lacquered boxes. He worked under Shah Sultan Husayn at the end of the 17th century AD, when he signed Ahmed al Nairizi al Sultan. Although he maintained a close association with royal ateliers he dropped the sobriquet al Sultan. After the Afghan invasion of 1722 AD, he moved to the house of Hajj Mohammed Sarraf. He remained active up to the middle of the 18th century AD.

Ahmed al Nairizi signed the Qur'an copy in 1713, now at the Chester Beatty Library. He exemplifed the transformation of an artist from the royal ateliers and patronage to a more independent single-folio calligrapher exploring the market. His distinctive Iranian Naskh style and expertise allowed him to ask for large amounts of money for his works. Al Nairizi was devoted to copying religious texts and his folios became examples followed by calligraphers such as Vidal (d. 1857) and Ali Askar Arsangani (1870).
Asad Allah
1252-1268 AH / 1836-1852 AD

Mirza Asad Allah Shirazi, a famous calligrapher during the times of Fatih Ali Shah, Mohammed Shah, and Nasir Adin Shah Qajar. He was trained at the royal court and was given the title "al Katib al Sultani", by Shah Mohammed. When Mohammed Shah became sick, Mirza Asad returned to Isfahan. His folios were known to make use of colours, which made them different and interesting. He produced a Qur'an for the Qajar sultan Fatih Ali Shah in 1247 AH / 1831 AD which is now in the Shaker collection.

Hakim ibn Vesal
1265 AH / 1848 AD

A calligrapher and poet who was a disciple of his father, Vesal, a famous calligrapher of the Qajar period. Hakim travelled to India and published a manuscript of poetry in Persian written in a fine calligraphic style. Hakim's original name was Mahmud, yet he preferred to use his sobriquet. Hakim was the most famed Nasta’liq calligrapher of Iran during the 19th century AD. His life ended when he contracted cholera in 1857.

Ibn Malik, Ahmed Mohammed Mohsen
1231 AH / 1814 AD

A famed calligrapher in the 19th century AD who specialised in Nasta’lig and Naskh. Ibn Malik was tutored by his father Mohammed Mohsen, who produced this folio signed in 1138 AH.
Khalil Allah
1220 AH / 1805 AD

Khalil Allah was the title acquired by Sultan Dawud Mirza, son of Mohammed Khalili, the grandson of Mir Sayyed Mohammed. He studied in Isfahan then moved to Murshidabad India, to be under the protection of the governor of Bengal, Alihvirdi Khan (1192 AH / 1778 AD). A similar signature found in the Muraqqas’ dated 1560s (The Read Album) identified the calligrapher as Khalil ibn Dervish Mohammed Mashahadi.

Malik al Deylami
924 AH / 1544 AD

A Persian calligrapher who was born in Qazvin, Malik al Deylami wrote in Thuluth and Naskh. He was a disciple of Rostam Ali and Hafiz Baba Jan and worked in the atelier of the Safavid courts. In 964 AH, he moved to Mashhad where he worked under Abu’l Fath Sultan Ibrahim Mirza. At a later period, Shah Tahmasp asked Malik to join his atelier to write the inscription of Divan Hafiz on the Iwan at the Chihil Sutun, Qazvin. He died in 969 AH/1562 AD. He compiled an album at the request of Amir Husayn in 1560. His son Mawlana Ibrahim joined the royal atelier in Istanbul.

"A jeweler knows the value of my calligraphy
Otherwise there are many worthless beads in the world
My calligraphy is sweet because
The cane of my pen produces sugar"

Malik Deylami
(1560 AD)

For the preface of the compiled album of
Shah Tahmasp
Mir Mahmud

d. 993 AH / 1585 AD

Mir Mahmud al Shihabi ibn Ishaq went to Bukhara with his son when Herat was captured by the Uzbeks in 1528. In Bukhara he was taught by Mir Ali Heravi and excelled in several styles of calligraphy, and then moved to Balkh. He signed folios in the Read Album, excelled in Nasta’liq, diagonal scripts and preferred to write love couplets with rhythm and movement. He left Balkh and returned to Herat, where he died in 1585 AD. (Safwat, p.130, Minorskey, 1959, p. 132-3).

Mohammed Shafie Haravi

1113 AH / 1702 AD

Mohammed Shafie Haravi al Hosseini established the Shikaotoh Nasta’liq script which was later mastered by Dervish Abdul Majid.
Mirza Mohammed Ismail
b. 1227 AH / 1812 AD

Mohammed Ismail started as a calligrapher and then excelled in the art of painting lacquerware. He is known to have favoured complex compositions, and his work was characterised by a strong western iconography. His brother Aqa Najaf was similarly a painter of lacquer work. Examples of signed caskets date to 1288 AH / 1671 AD are part of the collection of the Historical Museum Berlin. (no. 71/23)

Mohammed Ali
1252 AH / 1836 AD

A 19th century calligrapher who wrote in Naskh and excelled in religious single folios.
Mohammed Baqir Isfahani
1036-1109 AH / 1627-1698 AD

Mohammed Baqir Majlisi Isfahani was a leader under Sultan Husayn (1694-1722 AD). He was granted the title Mulla Bashi and worked on the compilation of Imam's Hadith, which was published in Arabic as Bihar al Anwar: the Seas of Lights. The Nawab Mirza Mohammed Baqir and his son Mirza Husayn were the subject of a painting by Mu'in Musavvir in 1674 at Isfahan. (Canby 88)

Mohammed Hadi Isfahani
d. 1135 AH / 1723 AD

Mohammed Hadi ibn Muhammad Amin Shirazi was the scribe who wrote "inter linear glosses" in the Qur'an manuscripts produced in 1694 AD for Shah Sulayman. He moved to Isfahan and worked under Shah Husayn (1694-1722 AD). Mohammed Hadi was supported by Mohammed Baqir and calligraphed his work in Arabic in the Naskh style. Mohammed Isfahani participated with Abdallah Jazdi in glossing a Qur'an in 1697-8 AD. He was a follower of Aqa Ibrahim Qumi and died during the Afghan invasion of Isfahan in 1135 AH/ 1723 AD.

Mohammed Ali Kirmanshahani
1238 AH / 1823 AD

A Persian calligrapher employed in the atelier of Shahzade Nasr Allah Mirza, Qajar period.