

An Analysis & Examination of Nastaliq Calligraphy Style of the Old Masters*

Abstract

More than six hundred years has passed since the creation of Nastaliq script in Iran. This type of calligraphy became popular for writing manuscripts and divans of Persian language poets from the 8th century AH onwards. Many masters of the field attempted to write in this style and hence, the creations of each master varies from the other one living in another era. These slight alterations produced by different masters in structure across time occurred gradually and so, it seems difficult for the unprofessional to distinguish the modifications. On the other hand, due to the geometrical nature of the structure of Nastaliq script, a significant part of such changes occurred since the advent of the script so far are measurable.

This article aims to define a framework to recognize the writing styles of the earliest masters to those living in the closing years of Qajar reign and also obtain a more precise comprehension of the visual values of Nastaliq calligraphy.

The term «style» used to describe the writings of these masters, denotes the features in visual literacy that enables one to recognize and compare a work of art with those of the other artists. Through this research, the author attempts to answer these questions (1: how can we elucidate the characteristics, main similarities and differences of Nastaliq calligraphy practiced by old masters since the Timurids reign till the overthrow of Qajar dynasty, who presented new styles and (2 what is the criteria of becoming a pioneer of a Nastaliq calligraphy style.

To find the answers to the aforementioned questions, first single letters and words written by each of the four leading calligraphers were extracted from those works that have undoubtedly attributed to them so far. Then, those letters and words which are most similar to their generally known works have been compared with the ones written by the three other master calligraphers so that not only the master's style is identified but also the similarity and difference of his art style with the others is clarified.

For making the comparison, effort has been made to employ explicit, often math-based rules. Each single letter or word has been displayed within a specific framework so as to facilitate visual comparison using distances and angles. Subsequently, those single letters and words were reviewed in the compositions of the works of the masters.

The results indicate that the above mentioned four styles have been formed in three periods: first during 850 - 950 AH considered as the genesis of Nastaliq script. Considering the fact that the script developed and evolved in the works of Mir Ali Heravi, he should be regarded as the foremost master of the style in this period. During the second period 950-1200) AH, (it was Mir Emad's time who mostly benefited from studying the existing treatises and works of his predecessors including Mir Ali Heravi, Baba Shah Esfahani and Mohammad Hussein Tabrizi. With his specific style, Mir Emad modified and restructured

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Nastaliq script .Throughout the third period 1350 -1200) AH ,(some renowned calligraphers including Mirza Mohammad Reza Kalhor ,Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani ,Mir Hossein Turk and Mirza Kazem practiced Nastaliq.

The widespread popularity of Nastaliq calligraphy in printing industry that occurred with the writings of Mirza Kalhor who presented manuscript writing in a new form, the development of Siah-Mashgh's principles and its development in the works of Mirza Gholam Reza are considered to be the stupendous characteristics of this era .Mirza Kalhor and Mirza Gholamreza's styles are considered the two remarkable ones of this period with the others being secondary.

Accordingly ,through studying the works of the four renowned master calligraphers of Timurid ,Safavid and Qajar eras i.e. Mir Ali Heravi ,Mir Emad ,Mirza Mohammad Reza Kalhor and Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani ,the Nastaliq style of the early masters can be appraised and categorized .The reason for such classification is that the works created by other masters are whether a subcategory of these four or they are not distinctly different as to be considered a separate style .More importantly ,masters of the succeeding epochs have been unable to present any innovation in the structure or instigate any new art movement .So generally ,their works of art have been copied less during the contemporary era.

While recognizing the similarities and differences of single letters, words and compositions of the four distinct styles mentioned herein and gaining the ability to differentiate the styles, this paper concludes that not just establishing any alteration in the structure of an already existing Nastaliq style leads to the emergence of a pioneer; Rather, becoming that, requires not only making modification and alteration in the structure of the letters and words but also enriching a Nastaliq style with sufficient visual lure and thus, influencing the writing styles of some contemporaneous and future calligraphers.

Keywords: Calligraphy, Style, Nastaliq, Old Masters

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