

Original Research Article

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جستاری درباره آشنایی‌زدایی در سنت خوشنویسی ایران (مطالعه موردی آثار سیاه مشق میرزا غلامرضا اصفهانی)

An Essay on Defamiliarization in the Iranian Calligraphy Tradition (A Case Study of the SiyahMashq of Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani)

Abstract

Problem Definition: Among the tendencies of calligraphy, we can mention the Qajar Siyah Mashq of the type of works of Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani, in which formalistic visual effects are preferred in these works of literary reading. whereas, in different tendencies of traditional calligraphy, despite the differences in visual expression, letters and phrases have been introduced with the intention of reading the context. But in Mirza Gholamreza's, SiyahMashq sometimes the "conventional use of writing" is of secondary importance or is completely ignored. In this article, these works are considered as a symbol of unfamiliarity with the common practice of calligraphy. This article tries to deal with their formalistic and abstract aspects from a new perspective by analyzing some significant examples in the black works of Mirzaghlanreza and some of her contemporaries in the late Qajar period.

Objective: The purpose of this study is to study and re-read the formative tendencies in traditional calligraphy and especially the mentioned Siyah Mashq.

Research Method: This research, which is presented qualitatively in a descriptive / analytical manner, based on field studies and library documented sources, has expressed its findings.

Results: One of the findings of this article is that of Nasta'liq Siyah Mashq in using calligraphic elements to create a harmonious composition that differs from the usual and conventional criteria of the calligraphy tradition. In terms of application, the emphasis on written forms leads to the attractiveness and aesthetic approach of the calligraphy letter, regardless of its conventional function of text readability.

Keywords

TraditionalCalligraphy, SiyahMashq, Defamiliarization, Formalism

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Introduction

In different historical periods, among the types of traditional Iranian arts, calligraphy, because it was used as a reason for verses of the Holy Qur'an and hadiths, received more attention than other arts. Calligraphy during the thirteenth century with many ups and downs in terms of quality reached a level that was considered a criterion and indicator of sacred and ritual art. Studies in the field of calligraphy aesthetics, although very limited and few, have paved the way for research on formalist tendencies in calligraphy. The emergence of formalism as one of the most important schools of literary criticism in Russia, in addition to literature and linguistics, gradually influenced other arts and spread rapidly. The founders of this school, such as Shkolovsky, who were often prominent Russian linguists, considered literature to be a purely linguistic subject. They believed that political, moral, social, and psychological perceptions should not be considered in the critique of a literary work and that these works should be examined linguistically in the first place; To put it more clearly, they valued form more than content. Russian formalists, however, did not fundamentally believe in the difference between form and content, and generally did not distinguish between them. In their view, the most important feature of lasting and influential literary and (artistic) works was the approach of their creators in creating a space for unfamiliarity with conventional and repetitive beliefs. In their view, the most important feature of lasting and influential literary and (artistic) works was the approach of their creators in creating a space for unfamiliarity with conventional and repetitive beliefs. In their view, the most important feature of lasting and influential literary and (artistic) works was the approach of their creators in creating a space for unfamiliarity with conventional and repetitive beliefs. In other words, from the point of view of Russian formalists, the artist work was considered to be dealing with de-familiarization and removing the dust of habit from the eyes of the audience. In visual and applied arts, and especially calligraphy, artists in many periods of the history of Iranian art have a different view of the strict rules and with special delicacy have shown the effects of this in their works. According to the theory of formalism in art, "works from the history of art that are famous for their representation or exaggerated representation have also been considered because of their formal characteristics because their representational and expressive features are contrary to the theorists' belief in representation and exaggerated representation of art, they are not intrinsic traits but merely apparent traits, because their only inherent attributes are their form or visual structure. (Avazpour, 2013, p. 169) The alignment of part of traditional Iranian calligraphy with the theory of formalists other than expressive aspects with a semantic approach and independent identity is important because this new look contrasts with the normal function of calligraphy (as an excuse for the context). "Calligraphy gives phone and word, to form and body, and calligraphy gives them a tangible form of taste. In addition, the importance of the meaning and value of the word in the tradition as well as the maximum interpretability of theology gives the word holiness to be referred to the meaning with more cryptography. Although each style of calligraphy - in its entirety - is strictly regulated in terms of geometry and shape, composition, and proportion of letters, these requirements distinguished combination with the freedom of action in improvisation, calligraphy in the Iranian art tradition. (Kamali Dolatabadi, 2017, p. 331) Decorative tendencies in the Siyah Mashq pieces of Nastaliq of the late Qajar period, especially the works of Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani, show that the creators of these works move from one calligrapher or scribe and artist to another, which an innovative and at the same time deconstructive look creates a new chapter in the evolution of contemporary Iranian's art. In this regard, this study answers the leading question that

How can the formalistic manifestation of calligraphy be considered as an interpretation of unfamiliarity in the art of calligraphy? And How does the mentioned Nastaliq SiyahMashq method contrast with the common applied forms of calligraphy? Regarding the necessity of this research, it should be said that most of the studies conducted in this case have a historiographical approach and less attention has been paid to the formalistic aspects of the script. The neglected aspect in previous research is the study of independent identity, the study of formalist tendencies in calligraphy, in which, apart from the reading of the text, only "manifestations of visual symptoms (illegible combination of letters) are presented.

Research Method

This research has been organized by qualitative method and descriptive / analytical expression and has reached its result by using library resources and visual study of examples of Siyah Mashq works index. The works in question in this limited study are a case study of SiyahMashq calligraphy pieces of Mirza Gholamreza and his contemporaries in the late Qajar period and are preserved in private collections and reputable museums. For image sources, referred to Saadabad Collection of Tehran (Mir Emad Calligraphy Museum), Malek National Library and Museum and National Museum of Iran (Islamic Era) and Anthropology Encyclopedia Center (Museum of Manuscripts and Cultural Art of Dr. Mohammad Sadegh Mahfouzi).

Research Background

A noteworthy point in examining the background of this research is the historiographical and non-analytical view of most researchers who have mainly dealt with the subject from other angles. (Rashvand, 2011) In the article " Siyah Mashq Visual Potential in contemporary typography" published in the Book of Art Month, refers to the visual symptoms, facilities and visual capabilities of SiyahMashq pieces and their use in a part of contemporary graphic works such as typography, which in some cases have common aspects in independent look to the visual nature of script in the present research and the above article. Moqbeli and Hosseini (2016) in the article "The role of the visual unconscious in the Siyah Mashq works of Mirzaghلامreza Esfahani". published in the journal Theoretical Foundations of Visual Arts from a historical perspective relying on formal qualities of works, they deal with the connection with artist unconscious, which was effective as a novel and special look in the current research process. Teymouri (2014) in the article "The processing of calligraphy in the Qajar period" published in the journal Roshd Art Education, creates suitable social contexts for the growth and prosperity of calligraphy in the Qajar era, as well as the style of writing the Nasta'liq suspension of artists such as Mirzaghلامreza Isfahani and his contemporaries. Also Teymouri (2011) in the article "Aesthetics in the style of Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani" published in Roshd Magazine of Art Education refers to special features and advantages of Mirzaghلامreza calligraphy style, especially in Siyah Mashq with the interpretation of a revolutionary event in the script in order to create aesthetic elements regardless of literary restrictions in the text which have several backgrounds with current research, with the difference that the researcher's tendency has been focused more on the technical aspects and the perfection of SiyahMashq than theoretical topics (formalist tendencies). Yamini and Shariat Panahi (2016) in the article "Study of effective factors in changing the style of Nasta'liq script in Qajar era calligraphy" published in the Journal of Islamic Art Painting. They refer to the historical evolution movement of the calligraphy common styles in the Qajar era. In addition pay to the process

of return of calligraphers to the traditions and changes and innovations in the forms and structure of calligraphy, especially in SiyahMashq, inscriptions and seals, which contain useful historical information. Hosouri (2020) in the book "The beauty of Persian calligraphy" published by Nashr-e Cheshmeh have briefly dealt with the changes in calligraphy and its expansion as well as decoration in calligraphy, That the author's aesthetic look at script form, is one of the few specialized researches in this field. Explain that the present article, without a technical look at the common writing methods and visual possibilities of a particular tendency of calligraphy (SiyahMashq), deals specifically with the formalistic aspects of the works that are generally created in the above-mentioned forms. A comparative study of these works with the models proposed in literary criticism from the perspective of formalists and in the first way comparing these methods as the main artistic approach in form-oriented works in the theory of meaningful form is a new perspective.

Theoretical Framework

Calligraphy is fundamentally systematic artistic in nature and relies on calligraphy skills, and this sometimes leads to the misconception that the more skillfully created calligraphic works will necessarily have a more desirable artistic load. In general, many concepts of the basics of the visual arts can be represented visually in alphabetical order (in the pure form). These elements are superficial (two-dimensional) and according to the visual structure of the script, they include composition, movement, rhythm, power, order, and other basic visual components, and in this regard, line symptoms are observed based on simple or complex visual forms .Contrary to habit, the forms of calligraphic letters in this mechanism are not expected to be readable or reflect different themes, and in fact, the script in its purest and most independent manifestation is considered here. At the same time, among the prominent aspects of abstract art today, its deconstructive and rule-breaking aspect has always been considered by critics; In general, calligraphy is text-based, expressive, and practical in terms of artistic structure, and the accompaniment of letters and words in the most beautiful visual proportions invite the viewer to watch a play with glorious and valuable themes. Although these features are not related to abstract art in theory, in certain cases (such as the Nasta'liq Siyah Mashq) manifestations of an abstract approach are observed in the form of calligraphy. In the late Qajar period, some calligraphers such as Mirzagholamreza Esfahani, by crossing the borders of exercising Siyah Mashq, achieve a degree of visual understanding of written forms, as a result of that, they create unique works based on a combination of forms with independent visual identity. At this stage, the calligrapher's view of familiar calligraphy elements as independent and separate (single letter) or combined (in the form of one or more syllable words) in Siyah Mashq is considered beyond the technical and skillful mechanism. The formal forms of the letters serve as the main background for a stunning display of elongations, arcs, and even punctuation, resulting from the entanglement of forms, composition, and fit in the spaces between the letters. As from the point of view of Russian formalism, poetic language (in literature) has no concern for communication, but its task is to turn its attention to itself as a language, and also because of the institutionalization of beauty in it, it has lost its normal function and gained credibility per se. Looking at the above, it can be inferred that ultimately deviating from the rules and principles of calligraphy and practice out of the ordinary, as well as a purely formalist attitude in the script is reminiscent of the view of familiarization in literary criticism and the school of formalism.

Unfamiliarity description in artistic creation

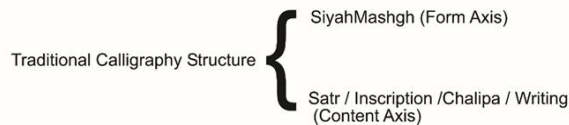
Getting out of the circle of repetitive habits of everyday life in the art world is an example of unfamiliarity with the general concept, which leads to the presentation of a new concept in the framework of the work of art. This process is the basis for the creation of most literary and artistic works that have been innovated and sometimes deconstructed in their endeavors. In fact, it is during the mechanism of de-familiarization that a work of art is formed and diverts the mind of the audience from the current realities to a different perspective. "According to Shklovsky, literary devices are constantly worn out and self-employed, but art tirelessly tries to refresh our vision, and that means unfamiliarity. Defamiliarization with the implication of the alienation of usual reality leads us to achieve a more realistic understanding of them instead of merely identifying them. (Mousavi, 2014, p. 30) Examples of the entanglement of form and content in poetry and the visual arts can be seen in the discourse of Russian formalists. In fact, if the artist draws attention to his own form, then the form becomes part of the content of the work, because the form is also a part of what is expressed. This view is evident in purely abstract paintings, because such paintings do not refer to the outside world, but to themselves. These paintings make us pay attention to their form, because all that they offer They are in form and that is enough. (Bertens, 2012, p. 47)

An overview of the developments of calligraphy in the Qajar period

After the collapse of the Safavid rule in the twelfth century AH and in a turbulent and unstable period, artistic activities, especially calligraphy, declined. Gradually, during the Qajar era, the government attention, including Fath Ali Shah and his calligrapher sons, almost all calligraphy items flourished again except for Kufi and Mohaghegh. During this period, the quality of calligraphy in manuscripts was improved compared to the Safavid period. "Another event was the new movements of the form and the structure of the calligraphy. Especially in the Siyah Mashq, inscriptions and calligraphy, which can be seen in the works of Mirza Gholamreza Isfahani, Mirza Kazem Tehrani, Mir Hossein Tork and Mirza Amo. (Yamini, Shariat Panahi, 2016, p. 25) "Special attention to Nasta'liq calligraphy and especially Siah Mashq, both in terms of creating novel combinations (aesthetic aspects) or in terms of forming a text-independent visual identity (formative aspects), was a new perspective of calligraphy in this era. A revolutionary event took place in the Siyah Mashq: calligrapher removed the literary aspect of calligraphy and turned to pure calligraphy. The letters and words that she wrote together to make script and writing, due to severe restrictions, had to follow a certain pattern, at this point she was freed from the shackles of literature and gained a kind of absolute freedom. The calligrapher starts on the new experience by creating a completely free context, creating new aesthetic elements that had never existed before. The emergence of combinations of letters and words, the creation of empty Pro spaces and the use of the effects of these spaces, the freedom of action in the construction and the payment of Siyah Mashq led to the creation of letters and words that were no longer a literary issue. The pure and free elements, and finally the beauty, the letters and words Until now, it was only used to make sentences and was limited to using the writing position, were released once again and experienced a new dance and Sama. Siah Mashq is considered as a long evolutionary step in Nasta'liq from this point of view. Nasta'liqi which is the point of evolution of the manuscript before it. (Teymouri, 2011, p. 38)

SiyahMashq

Form-oriented visual system in the Nasta'liq Siyah Mashq: The effects of perfectionism are evident during the historical evolution and aesthetic structure of the Nasta'liq script, and this evolutionary process has been made possible only by the variety of visual expression tones and writing styles of prominent calligraphers. In Nasta'liq calligraphy, the calligrapher goes beyond the rigid and cumbersome circle of calligraphy and creates eye-catching forms by creating innovative compositions and combining connections and elongations that manifest the creativity and dynamism of the calligrapher's mind before being reflected. "Islamic scripts morphologically have degrees of two general and different qualities: a / Geometric, angular, straight, broken, right-angled and rectangular forms, which show more moderation and balance with vertical elongations in static letters (Such as different writing styles of Kufic calligraphy). B / Oblique and elongated forms curved and spiral, circular and smooth, which with their fluidity create more calmness, spirit and contemplation (such as Divani's and T'liq Scripts or Nast'aliq or Broken Nast'aliq). In the dimensions and proportions of space, each style of calligraphy is written in two types according to its capacity: latent (without details and decorative movements, in small dimensions) and palpable (full of details and decorative movements in negative space of letters, in large dimensions). (Kamali Dolatabadi, 2017, p. 332) "In SiyahMashq, the calligrapher tries to create a harmonious combination by combining and repeating the familiar letters of the alphabet according to the weight of the blacks and whites of the page or frame (Sav'ad and Bay'az) and the rhythm of the repetitive letters. In this process, the ultimate goal is not the readability of the text, and because the geometry of writing in Siyah Mashq consists of letters in form of single word or besides together that evoke the phonetics familiar but illegible in the audience's mind, the freedom of the calligrapher to create the right composition leads to eye-catching works. The artist's approach to emphasizing aesthetic form is essentially for the audience who is unable to read the context or the text is deliberately hard-written, the viewer's eye is directed to look for an expectation other than readability (or not) in the Siyah Mashq pieces. This innovative look in the history of Iranian calligraphy is unprecedented except in cases where the calligrapher repeated pages as a matter of practice in full lettering to maximize the utilization of the paper surface. (See Chapter 1 & Figure 1)



Chapter 1. Division of traditional calligraphy works into text-based and content-oriented.

Source: [Kermaninejad, 1391, p. 129.](#)



Figure 1. A Siyah Mashq piece practiced by Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani (Qajar period), Malek Library and Museum. Source: <http://malekmuseum.org>

Visual capabilities of Nasta'liq Siyah Mashq: A formalistic and purely aesthetic view of the elements of calligraphy in Siyah Mashq as an independent and even unconventional format in terms of structure is considered a formalistic approach in Siyah Mashq that is similar to critics and experts in modern and progressive works. At first, the reason for the emergence of this attitude is focus on the written geometry of the Nasta'liq script. Of course, this point is important in the Siyah Mashq of Mirzagholamreza Esfahani and his followers, who did not sacrifice the beautiful form for readability in his Siyah Mashq. Calligraphy in Nasta'liq has a long history, which is evidenced by the history of proportions and distant proportions and flat letters in the Nasta'liq script. It should be noted that the Nasta'liq calligraphy, following in the footsteps of Iranian lyrical and mystical literature, is the only means of conveying the written concepts. Nasta'liq's special geometric structure (such as joints and elongations) relies on elements that, in the traditional atmosphere of traditional calligraphy, turn into dancing and twisting forms in the Siyah Mashq, and from this point of view are reminiscent of the visual language of abstract art. In the Siyah Mashq pieces of Nasta'liq, geniuses such as Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani, Mir Hossein Khoshnovis Bashi (Mir Hossein Tork) and Mirza Mohammad Kazem rise to the top the visual arrangement and combination of letters without prior reading the text. (See Figure 2, 3 & 4)



Figure 2. The Jali's Siyah Mashq piece by Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani (Qajar period), Saadabad collection, Tehran. Source: <http://sadmu.ir>



Figure 3. A Siyah Mashq piece written by Mir Hossein Khoshnevis Bashi (Qajar era), abjad letters, private collection. Source: <http://artworkshop.blogfa.com>

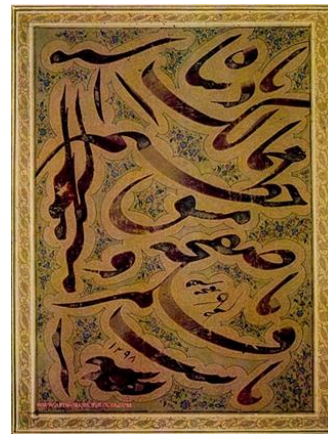


Figure 4. Jali Nastaliq Siyah Mashq in the manuscript of Mirza Mohammad Kazem (Qajar period), private collection. Source: <http://artworkshop.blogfa.com>

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An Essay on Defamiliarization in the Iranian Calligraphy Tradition (A Case Study of the SiyahMashq of Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani)

Volume 1o Issue 25. Page 45-54

52

Visual symptoms in the SiyahMashq of Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani: One of the most important characteristics of Mirza Gholamreza as a calligrapher is the unique situation that he had due to his innate genius and open mind in mastering various items such as Nasta'liq and Brocken Nasta'liq, as he wrote perfectly from the miniature script to the inscription. By creating a palpable Qalam (better than the practice pen) in Brocken script, he created works that were never seen before. The peak of beauty and creativity in his works is SiyahMashq pieces, which is far from all similar works in historical circles in terms of performance, observance of visual principles and selection and exact combination of visual symptoms. "Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani has reached the stage of perfection and maturity in the geometric system of calligraphy from 1280 AH, at the age of 45 years old, and has invented a novel and abstract method in his Siyah Mashq. A method in which the literary aspect is faded or omitted, and the combination and arrangement of letters and words can be traced in a range from absolute harmony to absolute entanglement. (Teymouri, 2011, p. 40) Mirza Gholamreza is one of the few calligraphers who, despite not observing the proportion of letters and words together and ignoring the baseline and frame, achieves a special formal harmony and shows a new effect of the visual elements of the script. (See Figures 5 & 6)

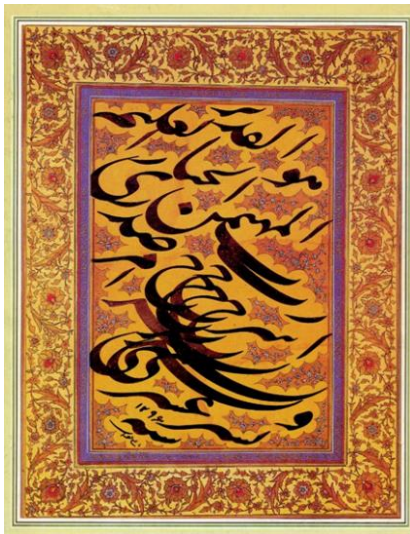


Figure 5. The Siyah Mashq piece of Jali religion in the style of Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani (Qajar period), Location of Negar Publications in Tehran.

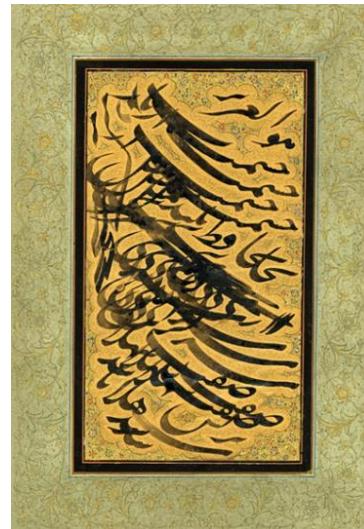


Figure 6. A Siyah Mashq piece of religious in the calligraphy of Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani (Qajar period), Location: Museum of Manuscripts and Cultural Art Works of Dr. Mohammad Sadegh Mahfouzi.

Conclusion

The historical background of calligraphy in Iranian-Islamic culture has been writing and publishing sublime and sacred themes. But this does not happen at certain points in the history of Iranian art. In its essence, calligraphy (like any systematic set of visual cues), regardless of its alphabetic and phonetic structure and grammar, relies on the dominance of the text in terms of purely formalistic values that can be viewed independently and with a single identity. The analysis of this issue in the new situation is of special importance both from the point of view of calligraphers' change in the position of calligraphy and as a

rediscovery of the visual capabilities of the written forms of traditional calligraphy. In general, this feature contrasts with the common definitions we know of calligraphy. By examining and analyzing the criteria examples, it can be achieved that the SiyahMashq format is more inclined to the pure form than other forms of traditional scripts, and sometimes their decorative aspects are preferred by the constant use of the script as a predicate for the text. About the SiyahMashq of Nasta'liq (as an example studied by the researcher) The calligrapher's view relies on the formalistic aspects of the letters and the complex composition of these forms before focusing on decorative applications, and other negative spaces can be seen at their intersections (Sav'ad and Bay'az) which are carefully controlled when writing the script. To pass calligraphers of the late Qajar period from the exercise of Siyah Mashq and reaching the position of the Siyah Mashq of the so-called art, which has an independent visual identity, is a turning point in the history of calligraphy in Iran. As mentioned earlier, the value, importance, and even the sanctity of calligraphy was in the text as it physically embodied it, but the formalist view of the works as expressed by the Russian formalists in literary form, and especially in poetic form, is a new critical and philosophical approach we are looking for it today. The Siyah Mashq works are like a window to intuition and poetry, but in Siyah Mashq if there is a sign of text, in the artist's deconstructive view, this mechanism is interpreted as a kind of unfamiliarity with the calligraphy, which gradually in recent decades provides backgrounds for the emergence of new and progressive arts.

Appendix

1. Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani (1246-1304 AD) was one of the famous calligraphers of the Qajar period who wrote the Brocken Nasta'liq and Nasta'liq calligraphy perfectly. Many inscriptions and numerous Siyah Mash remain from him.
2. Russian Formalism: One of the schools of literary criticism in the field of Russian literary research developed in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Russian formalism, in contrast to the dominant approaches to the study of literature, which viewed literature from the perspective of fields such as history, sociology, and psychology, placed its emphasis on the distinguishing features of literature. Critical Russian formalism made the analysis of the literary text the focus of its research, emphasizing the fundamental importance of form and striving to discover the internal laws of language and literature.
3. Meaningful form: This theory was proposed by Clive Bell, a critic of the English art historian in the early twentieth century, and was developed with the participation of Roger Fry And in general, he pays special attention to the relations between forms in works of art and is known as a leading theory of formalism in art.
4. Viktor Shklovsky: (author, critic and leading figure of the Russian school of formalism.
5. Fath Ali Shah Qajar (1150 to 1213 AD) nephew of Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar who was the Shah of Iran for 37 years and 2 months.
6. Mirza Mohammad Kazem Tehrani (1240-1325 AD), one of the prominent calligraphers of the Qajar period who wrote Nastaliq in the style of Seyyed Hossein.
7. Mir Hossein Khoshnevis Bashi, nicknamed Mir Hossein Tork (1236-1303), one of the 13th century pioneers calligraphers of the Qajar era.
8. Mirza Mohammad Ibrahim Tehrani (died 1282 AD) known as Mirza Amo, a 13th century Nasta'liq writer and one of the students of Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani.

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An Essay on Defamiliarization in the Iranian Calligraphy Tradition (A Case Study of the Siyah Mashq of Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani)

Volume 1o Issue 25. Page 45-54

54

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