

Mishkin Qalam

XIX Century Artist and Calligrapher

1826–1912 A.D.

انجمن هنر و
آگاهی
سوئیس

Persian Letters and Arts Society
Landegg Academy, Switzerland

PREFACE

Mirzá Hussain Isfahání, who was given the title "Mishkín Qalam" (black or musk-scented pen) by the Shah of Persia, will always have a special and exalted rank among the great masters of calligraphy and design.

Although some Iranian scholars, perhaps due to religious prejudice, have either ignored or made only a passing reference to Mishkín Qalam's work,¹ many fair-minded scholars and researchers have praised him as a great master of his art. For example Muhammad 'Alí Karímzádeh Tabrizí has testified² that Mishkín Qalam was "an innovative creator of *tughras* from Isfahan who produced masterpieces by combining calligraphy with figure-drawing (now called calligraphic painting) and illuminated them in gold and other decorative colors. I have seen his *tughras* that were in the form of a bird, Bismillah or a human face, or in *chalipa* style and all were signed Mishkín Qalam and dated between 1305 to 1325 A.H. The best of the artist's *tughras* displayed in Islamic World Festival exhibition in London was in the form of a bird composed of letters and it was signed 'servant of the gate of Bahá, Mishkín Qalam, 1305.' Another beautiful work of this master was in the form of a bird facing its mirror image, composed of words, and the margins were exquisitely illuminated. This fine piece which was sold in 1977 by Spinks Gallery in London was signed 'Servant of the gate of Bahá, Mishkín Qalam, 1307.' Mishkín Qalam died in 1330 A.H. and is buried outside Iran"³

There is no doubt that Mishkín Qalam's skill was not limited to *nasta'liq*, the style that was perfected by Mír 'Imád Hassani Seifí Qazviní. He excelled in every style of calligraphy prevalent in his days. Evidence of his mastery is a piece in which he has written some of the verses of Bahá'u'lláh⁴ in the seven principal styles of calligraphy. In that masterpiece he has demonstrated the highest level of calligraphic skill. Another example is a copy of *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh* the opening page of which he has written in *nasta'liq* and *naskh*.

In *Ruhu'l-Khat Al'Arabi* (the spirit of Arabic calligraphy) [2nd. edition, Lebanon, 1988] Kamál-el-Bábá, himself a peerless artist, has included five works of Mishkín Qalam in the chapter entitled *Lawhát-i Fanní* (masterpieces). All of them are in very fine *nasta'liq* style. One which stands out is a special arrangement of a verse which means "He will glorify the one who is humble and will abase he who is greedy." Another piece that catches the eye is a verse from the Holy Qur'an in the form of a cone. Kamál-el Bábá refers to Mishkín Qalam as the Persian Bahá'í calligrapher.

'Abdu'l-Muhammad Irani, editor of the periodical *Chihrihnama*, in his book *Peydayish-i Khat va Khattátán* (Calligraphy and Calligraphers) [Tehran:n.d., p. 356] has these words about Mishkín Qalam. "In mastery of the seven styles he was indeed peerless among his contemporaries and must be counted among the geniuses of his age. His work which is of unparalleled beauty is now displayed in libraries in Syria and Egypt."

Mehdi Bayani in his three-volume work *Ahvál va Áthár-i Khushnivísán-i Nasta'liq Nivísán* (Life and Work of Calligraphers in Nasta'liq) after quoting the above words of Abdu'l-Muhammad Khan adds that the inscriptions in the mausoleum of Mirzá Muslim (located near the shrine of Seyyed Hamzih in the Sorkháb district of Tabriz) are the work of Mishkín Qalam. These inscriptions were made on paper and attached to the walls of the shrine under glass. Bayani praises Mishkín Qalam's *nasta'liq*, *shikastih ta'liq*, and *shikastih nasta'liq* calligraphy.

It is worth noting that although Mishkín Qalam is an outstanding calligrapher, he was not the only eminent calligrapher among the Bahá'ís. From the very beginning of the new religion special attention was paid to calligraphy, and all that is written in the hand of the central figures of this Faith witness that attention. The Báb writes "Permission is not given to anyone to write even a single letter of the Bayán except in the best of

handwritings.⁶ The Báb himself most often used *shikastih nasta'liq* and the speed of his writing was the source of astonishment of those present. Calligraphic exercises in the handwriting of Bahá'u'lláh when still a child are available. The beauty of those pieces is evidence of being instructed by His illustrious father Mírza 'Abbás (Buzurg) Núrí, who was one of the greatest calligraphers of the Qájár era.

The publication of the present collection of the works of the great master of calligraphy and graphic design, *Mishkín Qalam*, honors one who lived for many years in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and received from His words the inspiration to create unique pieces of calligraphy and art. It also commemorates the centenary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'u'lláh has not only given humanity a set of moral and spiritual teachings, he has also laid the foundation for a new civilization and a new world order. Its goal is to gather all of humanity together under the banner of peace, fellowship and justice. In His teachings, Bahá'u'lláh has emphasized art, creativity, praise and respect for nature, and loving care for whatever God has created. This compilation is but a small tribute to all those who are striving to build a better and more beautiful world and hope that one day goodness, beauty and truth will take the place of ugliness, evil and deceit.

In conclusion it remains for us to acknowledge the contributions of all those who have helped in the production of this compilation, especially Dr. Vahid Rafati and Professor Anna Marie Schimmel who have provided brief introductions to the life and work of *Mishkín Qalam*; Dr. Mohammad Afnan and Mr. Saeed Motamed who assisted with the selection of the specimens of *Mishkín Qalam*'s calligraphy and took charge of technical matters connected with printing of the compilation with great patience, sincerity and care; also Dr. Manuchehr Derakhshani and Mr. Foad Rosta'i who assisted in the translation and editing work for this volume. Finally we express gratitude to Mr. Amanullah Mooghen who, himself an acknowledged artist, has graced this volume with his calligraphy.

The production of such a compilation requires a substantial capital. Without the generosity and support of Mr. Hussaingholi and Mrs. Khojasteh Kiayani the project would not have been realized. We wish all of these dear colleagues evermore success in their literary, artistic and humanitarian services.

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1. For instance the four volume *Ahvál va Áthár-i Khushnivísán* (Life and Work of Calligraphers,) 2nd. ed. Tehran: 1363 AH (1984).
2. *Ahvál va Áthár-i Naqqáshán-i Qadím-i Iran va Barkhí az Masháhir-i Nigárgar-i Hind va 'Uthmání* (Life and Work of Ancient Iranian Painters and Some Indian and Ottoman Artists), 2 volumes, London: 1369 AH (1990)
3. For a biography of *Mishkín Qalam* see "Mishkín Qalam" by Dr. Mehrdad Meshgin (his great grandson) in *Herald of the South*, Vol. 3, April 1985, pp. 2-11, or articles by Amanullah Mooghen in *Khoosh-i há'í az Kharman-i Adab va Honar*, Vol. 1, and by Saeed Motamed in *Khoosh-i há'í az Kharman-i Adab va Honar*, Vol. 4.
4. Mírzá Husayn-'Alí, entitled Bahá'u'lláh, Founder of the Bahá'í Dispensation
5. Mírzá 'Alí-Muhammad of Shíráz, known as the Báb, was the inaugurator of the Bábí Dispensation and the Forerunner of the Bahá'í Dispensation
6. *Persian Bayán*, Báb-i Hifdahum (chapter 17), Váhid Sivum (unit 3)



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