

Persian translation of this paper entitled:
خوشنویسی اسلامی، نماد مقاومت در برابر روند غربی شدن
(با تکیه بر نظریه مطالعات پسااستعماری)
is also published in this issue of journal.

Original Research Article

Islamic Calligraphy, a Symbol of Resistance to the Process of Westernization (Based on the Theory of Postcolonial Studies)

Hojat Amani^{1*}, Hasan Bolkhari Ghahi², Sedaqat Jabbari Kalkhoran³

1. Ph.D in Analytical and Comparative History of Islamic Art, University of Tehran, Iran.
2. Professor, Ph. D in Islamic Studies, Philosophy of Art, University of Tehran, Iran.
3. Professor, Ph.D in Art Research, University of Tehran, Iran.

Received: 19/09/2020

accepted: 06/02/2021

available online: 23/09/2021

Abstract

Problem statement: Confrontation with the West has facilitated the influence of colonialism on Islamic societies and changing the contextual discourse of the structure of the traditional and social systems has brought about critical and profound changes in all areas, including Islamic culture and art. With the westernization of art education and progress and technology in various industries meanwhile the art of traditional book embellishment flourished.

With the westernization of all manifestations of art and related technologies, the traditional art of book embellishment has become less obsolete and led to the “marginalization” of this art. The formation of post-colonial studies, with the “resistance” stance towards power in colonial forms, as well as the rejection of Western academia by some leading Western artists, has challenged the legitimacy of Western principles and aesthetics as a gold standard. Thus, Islamic artists turned again to calligraphy as a symbol of resistance and an element that was born out of Islamic civilization to find identity, and get rid of the consequences of colonialism, and reproduce indigenous culture.

Research objective: Recognizing the factors that protect Islamic calligraphy from colonialism.

Research method: This article considers two main factors as effective in examining the cause of Islamic calligraphy resistance against the westernization process. First, the social situations and the search for a new identity, which is the byproduct of post-colonial influences, have led the traditional Art return to the origins and the theory of resistance. Such return has protected the traditional calligraphy from colonialism and cultural imperialism. Second, the quality and the possibilities of creative calligraphy, often coupled with the divine words possess abstract nature in essence and objectivity; it is fused with the treasures of wisdom as well as literature and humanities, and it is adaptable to other Islamic arts and ways of teaching and learning which is ultimately deeply rooted in the tradition and mysticism of Islam. Therefore, it can be concluded that Islamic calligraphy in the contemporary era will be able to maintain its originality and identity if it keeps its creative aspects and maintains its connection with the wisdom of its teachings and traditions.

Keywords: *Calligraphy, Resistance, Globalization, Islamic, Postcolonial.*

* Corresponding author: +989166664796, hojatamani@gmail.com

Introduction and statement problem

The confrontation with the West, which took place in the last years of the eighteenth century, can be considered the beginning of the institutionalization of modernity in the Islamic world, which is the “influence of colonialism” as a result of a confrontation between traditional and modern discourses in Islamic societies. Therefore, post-modern Islamic societies have gone through ups and downs in various fields and have faced crises and profound changes in the discourse context of the traditional and social system structure. Thus, traditional culture and arts also have undergone a crisis and transformation with the emergence of Western-style schools and art academies (Naef, 2003, 171). Alternatively, despite industrial advances in the production of traditional arts, including the prevalence of hand printing in Istanbul as the capital of the Ottoman Empire (the center of Islamic ruling) coupled with the desire of courtiers to use Western arts, painting, led to the extinction of traditional art. However, calligraphy despite its decline, continued to be developed and used (Ali, 1997, 178). This research seeks to explore the reasons why Islamic calligraphy has managed to survive despite the occurrence of modern art movements in Islamic societies and the expansion of art education based on Western methods. Therefore, the restoration of calligraphy in the contemporary era and the preservation of the originality of calligraphy against the process of westernization is of special importance, which requires the reasons for its preservation to be identified and the capabilities of traditional and indigenous arts in the contemporary era be recognized.

Literature review

Islamic calligraphy has been studied from different perspectives by scholars of Islamic and Western societies. However, no studies to this date have examined this issue from the point of view of a postcolonial perspective, and this outlook is very new. “Reexploring Islamic Art” by

Sylvia Neaf (Naef, 2003), which focuses mainly on contemporary Arab visual arts, has among other arts, considered contemporary calligraphy as a symbol of Islamic artists’ innovation in contemporary art. Also, on Islamic calligraphy, in an article entitled “Rediscovering Islamic Art”, he revived the art of calligraphy in the contemporary era and believed that it is a temporary phenomenon for the traditional innovation that have been previously forgotten by artists in contemporary Arab art and has been adapted to Western art. While this research pays attention to the resistance of calligraphy to Westernization and the capabilities of this art, the other calligraphy studies focused on historiography and documentaries such as “Islamic Calligraphy” (Blair, 2006).

Sheila Blair, who has studied evolution of Islamic calligraphy in Islamic lands as well as new trends in calligraphy. However, she did not enumerate the reasons why Islamic calligraphy has survived the trend of Westernization. Similarly, Habibollah Fazaeli (Fazaeli, 2013), who has mostly introduced and identified the types of lines, the atlas of calligraphy, and the history of their formation, focused solely on these topics. Annemarie Schimmel’s phenomenological approaches to penetrating the hidden layers of calligraphy and its importance and status are discussed, also did not deal with the resistance and reasons for the survival of calligraphy in Islamic civilization (Schimmel, 2010). Seyed Hossein Nasr’s works on Islamic calligraphy (e.g. Nasr, 1996) look at the subject of Islamic calligraphy from the perspective of mysticism and Sufism and look at its spiritual aspects, which can be one of the reasons for Islamic calligraphy’s resistance to Westernization, but to other aspects, especially resistance to influence. Colonialism studied in this study was not considered by him.

Theoretical foundations

• Definition of key concepts

Islamic calligraphy: It is composed of two words

“calligraphy” and “Islamic” next to each other, which is briefly used in this study.

Calligraphy according to Sheila Blair’s definition denotes a handwriting whose author intends to create an aesthetic effect on the viewer; a text that not only conveys a message through its semantic content but also speaks through its physical appearance. Compared to linguistics, calligraphy for writing is like eloquence in speech. In this sense, calligraphy is the opposite of cacography (Blair, 2006, 14).

The word Islam here also includes issues related to the culture or civilizations under the influence of Islam. It refers to the culture cultivated in the lands in which Islam has had a major presence. Therefore, the term Islamic calligraphy here refers to the concept of Good handwriting and its types that have gained popularity in the context of Islamic culture and civilization and this popularity has continued till this day and its connection with that culture has not been disconnected.

• Postcolonial theory and studies

Postcolonialism, like many other epistemological theories, lacks a clear and unified semantic explanation. This apparent lack of coherence and disagreement within the goals, methods, and political achievements of postcolonialism, which is considered by some critics to be a major shortcoming of this theory, is considered by some, including Homi Baba, to be the strength of this theory. Muslim has created a chaotic and changing theory of post-colonialism. This fact manifests itself from the very beginning by considering the word postcolonial and its two separate parts: “post” - and “colonial”.

The prefix Posta does not mean “after” but “after the beginning” or “on the verge”. “Some theorists write the term postcolonial, like post-structuralism and postmodernism without a dash, and others emphasize the need to use a dash between post and colonialism. Proponents of the dash believe that the term should indicate a state of consciousness that is completely different from the consciousness of

its earlier period and the dash after the prefix helps to achieve this important” (Mousavi & Darroudi, 2013, 17).

The term post-colonial is considered by some to be synonymous with imperialism, Edward Said, in his famous work Culture and Imperialism, distinguishes between imperialism and colonialism. In his view, imperialism refers to “the practice, theory, behavior, approach, and center of domination that governs a large region, and colonialism, which always occurs as a result of imperialism, means the reduction of power and establishment in this vast region” (Saeid, 2011, 64).

• Postcolonial theory and critique

Postcolonial theory and critique are above all concerned with the analysis of colonial discourse and the challenge to the imperialist and hegemonic subject of Western man. Postcolonial critique seeks to reveal that the economic and political domination that constituted the key elements of imperialism and colonialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has always been accompanied by the formulation and formation of discourses in which the emphasize has been on the “Otherness” of people from Asian and African continents. The title of independent identity was denied and culturally colonized, and at the same time, the cultural and moral superiority of European powers were always affirmed and emphasized without the slightest hesitation or veiling (Boin and Rantansi, as cited in Ansari & Darroudi, 2014, 4).

Although some people have written about this before, with the studies of Edward Saeid, especially after his book *Orientalism* in the 1980s, this issue found a way to the academic world of Europe and America and was discussed. Saeid’s work is based on the “resistance” that was formed in the face of anti-Westernize. Saeid argues that any kind of marginalization leads to resistance. Resistance movements entails that all various marginalized group come to the center. With the modernization of calligraphy and advent of Western-style paintings, calligraphy was marginalized, yet calligraphy was

able not to not only break free from decline but also flourish and develop.

• Resistance

Resistance: It is a motivation that has been addressed against Western culture in postcolonial studies. Persistence and resistance aim at various aspects of the cultural heritage of the colonialists, which target non-Western societies in the form of various ideas and theories of culture and art. One of the main motivations in postcolonial studies is to present a resistance reading of power in its colonial, neo-colonial, patriarchal, discourse, and material forms to disrupt the cognition of this power, the claims of truth, and its representation strategies. In other words, the postcolonial theory explores the experiences of the suppression of resistance, race, gender, representation, difference, displacement, and migration in relation to historical, philosophical, scientific, and linguistic discourses in the West” (Sardar and Van Loon, as cited in Mozaffari, Asadian & Sharifi, 2017, 24).

Thus Islamic and native Identity led to the formation of a “multi-centralized” system, and the “legitimacy” of Western discourse was challenged. Saeid believed that one should not confront the principles of the West as opposed to Orientalism, but emphasized the values of universality such as freedom, monotheism, and the denial of oppression, discrimination, humiliation, justice. There is an Islamic worldview that must be resisted by Orientalist thoughts. Therefore, given that the roots of these ideas of universality are in Islamic culture, these countries, by emphasizing the ideas of universality, have somehow been able to “confront” the culture of “Orientalism” and create their own “independent” culture (Mokhtari & Dehghani, 2016, 89).

Based on this brief study, it can be said that despite the prevailing differences among thinkers in this field, what is agreed upon by postcolonial theorists and critics is the re-evaluation of the traditional relation, the emphasis on indigenous science versus colonial science. It has been an important tool in the

direction of colonial policies throughout the history of colonialism. All thinkers of postcolonial studies highlight the issues such as colonial and neo-colonial oppression, resistance to colonialism, colonialist and colonized identity, patterns of interaction between these identities, post-colonial migration, and colonization after colonization by the dominant culture. Also, issues of race and ethnicity, language, gender, identity, class, and above all power is at the heart of these discussions. Therefore, paying attention to traditional arts, especially calligraphy for various reasons and its resistance to colonial culture in Islamic societies is more important from the perspective of postcolonial studies.

Research Methodology

The research method in this article is descriptive-analytical. In this type of research, in addition to examining the “current situation”, it enumerates “its features and characteristics” and then “explains” the reasons for how and why the situation is, as it is. In fact, this study seeks to explain the resistance of Islamic calligraphy to the process of Westernization. The data were collected from the relevant documents and then described and analyzed through the lens of the post-colonial theory of Edward Saeid and Homi Baba.

Methodology: a qualitative method has been utilized to analyze the findings of this study. This study strives to also understand the how and why of the situation. More specifically, this research is seeking to understand the reasons for Islamic Resistance movements in calligraphy. The data will be based on documents gathered and then they will be reviewed and explicated by using the postcolonial theory of Edward Saied and Homi Baba.

The strategy in the qualitative method is often through inferential analysis and moving from specific observations to general observations.

The Process of Westernization of Art in Islamic Societies

The confrontation between traditional and

modern discourses in the late eighteenth century paved the way for the influence of colonialism in Islamic societies and created the conditions for the emergence of art schools and academies as the first way for Western methods to influence art. Western painting was taught in Istanbul military schools and the Academy of Fine Arts were under the tutelage of Osman Hamdi, a student of Jean-Leo Jermo, a French Orientalist painter who began his work in 1883 (Renda, Grabar & Pinar, 1988, 17). With the replacement of Western art forms such as tripod painting and sculpture instead of traditional art in Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, and Tunisia, which were directly exposed to the West earlier than other parts of the Islamic world, Westernization began rapidly and involved modern Islamic artists. This trend alienated these artists and created a rift and distance from the roots of their heritage and civilization. Thus, important centers in the Arab world were adapted to Western art forms and art academies and schools (in Western styles) were established in these areas. They started their activity. Of course, it goes without saying that before the establishment of these centers, scholarships were provided to young people in European countries, and some of these young people were employed in these centers. These institutional changes indicate the acceptance and adaptation of the Western method in the production, education, and imagination of art (Naef, 2003, 165). The situation in the Arab world (what we call today) was different from Istanbul as the center of the Ottoman Empire and Iran in terms of the necessary infrastructure for high-level art production, but in general, it can be said that the development of modern art in the Islamic world in all Islamic countries has been the same regardless of the time.

In addition, the strengthening of economic, political, and military ties with the West led to their physical and cultural dominance, and ultimately to the loss of confidence and inferiority of artists in the heritage of their ancestors. In other words, Islamic societies were colonized, which led to the

rise of traditional arts and their marginalization in the Islamic world, but paradoxically, Islamic calligraphy did not stagnate, while other book-making arts, such as illustration, Imitation, and bookbinding declined, but calligraphy retained its dignity and originality for several reasons, including its intrinsic connection with copying the Holy Qur'an, and this could have been the first artistic insight into the Islamic world.

Cultural awakening in the Islamic world

After World War II, when Western colonialism retreated to West Asia (Middle East), space was created in the field of visual arts in which Western artists gained new visual experiences while rejecting Western academic instructions and using inspirations from elements and forms of Islamic Arts. Such artists developed and promoted the artistic traditions of the Islamic world. For example, Henri Matisse, who credited his art to the East after visiting the Islamic Art Exhibition held in Munich in 1910 stated: The East saved us (Ettinghausen & Grabar, 1999, 62).

In addition, other important components such as the emergence of nationalism, as well as the formation of new identities after World War II, and the independence of governments in the region, granted the Islamic artists with a new pride in their nationality and political independence. This newfound enabled them to question the prevailing trends and tendencies of their time (mostly Western). Thus, the local and indigenous visual traditions that were previously rejected by Western teachers as non-artistic restored the status of art to many artists in the field. Thus, artists in these areas began to return to their roots and explore their heritage. This cultural awakening led Islamic artists to the growth and development of contemporary arts in the Islamic world.

At this stage, when Islamic artists saw themselves as fragmented, they were trying to find their identity and saw it as the only means of preserving themselves. Some of these artists believed that art

was a universal matter and did not see the need to use their cultural heritage, while some continued to focus only on local subjects and themes in European formats, while others sought to share their past heritage to identify their work. But how could they create a new creative vision with the Western teachings and academic training they had undergone? Thus, to replace Western methods, they resumed their study of the components of the past civilization, forming some local currents and movements, the most important of which can be the Association of Art Supporters in Egypt, the Baghdad Modern Art Group. Others were the old Khartoum school in Sudan, the Saqakhaneh School in Iran, and the next group in Iraq. In short, the efforts of artists in these local movements and schools to localize art, as well as the search for identity in the West Asian region, have some aspects in common: the use of local themes and subjects. And the role of indigenous and local motifs in the framework of well-known Western styles such as Cubism, Expressionism, and even Abstract are among them that can be recognized. Similar political and social changes in the structure of societies and the growth of the intellectual space in the shadow of postcolonial studies and theory led them to seek a local style and manner that was not influenced by the principles of Western art. Hence, he invited Islamic artists to rediscover their heritage, which has indigenous and anti-Western components, which they recovered in calligraphy.

Return to Islamic calligraphy

Due to the flood of currents of Western art, cultural diversity, migration, and holding exhibitions with various trends and the publication of various art books on Western art, the figurative art of Islamic artists was not seen among them. Remaining a statue, a reference to Islamic art was not the main issue, and this was for technical reasons, and another issue was that this heritage (statue) was not significant and in competition with modernity (Naef, 2003, 167).

On the one hand, the modeled art of Islamic artists was measured and seen by the standard of Western art because it was the result of the teachings and principles of Western aesthetics. Meanwhile, Islamic art was marginalized by some Western experts on the viewpoint that Islamic art is a mere decorative element for its lack of compatibility with the concepts of Western art, and for political reasons they denied its legitimacy as an art. It was an idea that spread so much that it persisted for so long that Goetz, an Indian scholar, and director of the Barbuda Museum, stated in an entry in the British Encyclopedia No. 12 of 1960: "Islamic art is essentially decoration." Page 708 Claude Louis Strauss also wrote in his account of his voyage to the East with the idea that it was not Islamic art: At the aesthetic level, Islamic extremist fundamentalists rejected the carnal with minor matters such as perfumes, embroidery and gardening (*ibid.*, 166).

In addition, the prevailing atmosphere in the late nineteenth century with the theorizing of the thoughts of the French philosopher Ernest Renan, who with his lecture on "Islam and science" at the Sorbonne and his publication in the journal *Deba* 1883, began a series of intellectual and literary debates in the world of Islam and the West. He considered the Arab people were not interested in aesthetics and Islam as opposed to science and philosophy, and openly emphasized the inferiority of the Semitic race to the Aryan race. He based his claim on the superiority of the Aryan race over the Semitic race on Arab philosophy. All that can be said about Arab philosophy is that Greek philosophy was written in Arabic. At the same time, Arab philosophers were more than non-Semitic. According to Renan, the Semitic race does not have the competence and ability of philosophical thought. Hence, these people have not created any philosophical work that belongs to them. For the Semites, philosophy was nothing more than a foreign adaptation of Greek philosophy (Mustafa Abdul-Razzaq, as cited in Abdullahi, 2018, 236).

Immediately after the publication of this sermon, which was translated into different languages, various theories and refutations were written on it, including that of Seyyed Jamaluddin Afghani (Asadabadi) 1254-1314 AH. It was also criticized from the perspective of postcolonial theories. Inspired by the ideas of Michel Foucault, Edward Saeid considers many of Western writings on the East to be a colonial discourse. He believes that the writings of Renan and others created a discourse through which Western culture was able to introduce the "East" as a lower class. "The purpose of dealing with the Orient is to talk about it, to approve opinions about it, to describe it, to teach about it, to dwell on it, and to rule over it. In this article, Orientalism means a Western way to dominate the Orient and change its structure and exercise power over it" (Saeid, 2011, 22). Accordingly, Western postcolonial literature emerged to fundamentally change East-West attitudes and Western culture and achieve exploitative goals.

In such a situation, which was briefly described, Islamic artists wanted to replace everything they had done with original and genuine content, so they were no longer satisfied with pulling down statues and symbols taken from their traditions (Ali, 1997, 181). Thus, they sought a way to get rid of the consequences of colonialism and reproduce indigenous culture to the purest Islamic art, namely, calligraphy, because it was rooted in the traditions of Islamic societies and as part of certain Islamic traditions continued to resist colonial influence. It had preserved Westernization and enjoyed it as an art unique to Islamic civilization.

Calligraphy resistance to westernization

The main reasons for calligraphy's resistance to the process of Westernization can be considered as the result of two main and basic factors: One was the change of social conditions and discourse order in Islamic societies in confrontation with Western culture and the consequent post-colonial studies of Muslim scholars that led to the revitalization of

calligraphy and resistance movement from being marginalized. In addition, in the shadow of the orders of Muslim intellectuals and postcolonial studies on the return to self, especially the resistance to calligraphy as a traditional art was marginalized and a factor to show identity, led to the re-emergence of calligraphy. Contemporary artists have used it as a special feature of the art of Islamic societies in the face of various Western styles and Sikhs in the world arena.

Another important factor is the nature and capability of calligraphy itself, which has stood on its own two feet in the Islamic world. Islamic calligraphy, while being abstract in form and nature, has been linked to the divine word since the beginning of its birth in Islamic civilization. Therefore, its intrinsic connection with the scriptures of Holy Quran has always led to the preservation of its originality in Islamic civilization. In addition, its distinctive visual features and its application along with other Islamic arts, as well as its principles and methods of writing, teaching, and learning, originated in traditions, teachings of Islamic and mystical teachings, which point to its important components.

1- The abstract nature and objectivity of calligraphy

The nature of Islamic art is abstract art according to the Quranic verse "لن ترانى" (Bolkhari Ghahi, 2019, 14). The word abstraction means existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical or concrete existence.

"Abstract concepts such as love or beauty" (Moin, 2003, 726). Therefore, the meaning of abstraction in calligraphy, regardless of its nature, its manifestation in the form of visual or objective approach (face) also has an abstract quality, in the sense that it has no external application. This feature also distinguishes Islamic calligraphy from Far Eastern calligraphy. The difference between abstraction in Islamic calligraphy is that writing becomes the main - and sometimes the only - element of decoration. This fundamental

transformation largely stems from the central role of theology in Islam (Blair, 2006, 18).

Therefore, Islamic calligraphy, in terms of its abstract nature and form, has been similar to the expression of the divine word. As the geometry of the letters in Islamic calligraphy has the same form and content together as a unit, it has carried the burden of the image. Since the visual arts are banned in most official and religious positions. Accordingly, writing became a tool for expressing power, belief, legitimacy, and many other thoughts and ideas that were used elsewhere to express images. According to Erica Dad, Islamic culture is the “image of the word” (ibid., 21). Therefore, the creative change of letters in Islamic calligraphy in many cases has played the role of image transmission at the same time. The head of the Quranic quests (Sora) is one of these cases. Also, in the work of the contemporary Lebanese artist Hussein Madi, entitled “Ein” (Fig. 1), meaning spring and eyes, he has tried to induce a visual representation along with the letters.

2- Corrosion with the divine words

Calligraphy from the beginning of its birth has been associated with recording and preserving the divine word and has been able to perform its highest duty, which is to convey concepts in the sacred texts. Preservation of sacred texts with a special writing system that has been established for the religious purposes, caused the origin of this art to be considered religious and sacred in nature, and in ancient mythology to refer to its inhuman and divine origins. Martin Lings, like many historians of Islamic art, believes that it was the Qur’an that created the need for writing, especially calligraphy. If there was not Quran, There would have not been calligraphy. At that time, the line was used for ordinary purposes. As we know, the Arab tribes were poets, but their poets did not like their poetry to be written. They preferred the people of the next generation to forget their poetry and leave it to the future. But the revelation of the Qur’an made



Fig. 1. Hossein Madi, “The Letter Ein” (1973), print on cardboard. Source: Naef, 2003.

writing necessary. Every syllable in the Bible had to be carefully recorded. It was no longer possible to rely solely on human memory, which is subject to error (Lings, as cited in Mousavi Rokni, 2016, 62). Nasr has also highlighted the sanctity of calligraphy that: “Since the Qur’an is considered the word of God and His action, so its writing is equally sacred” (Nasr, 1996, 32).

The astonishing growth and development of calligraphy are directly related to the writing of the Qur’an. Therefore, calligraphers have used the best example of their art and the utmost competence in writing the word of God (Afshar Mohajer, 2000, 49). Therefore, the importance of calligraphy among other Islamic arts is its connection with the divine word. In other words, through the mosaic of passages, phrases and words, God extinguishes the agitation of the mind by Himself taking on the appearance of mental agitation. The Quran is like an image of everything the human brain can think and feel, and it is by this means that God exhausts human disquiet, infusing into the believer silence, serenity and peace. Frithjof Schuon in *The Knowledge of Islam Book*. These verses are not just sentences for conveying thoughts, but they have a kind of soul, they have power, they are a

charm” (as cited in Schimmel, 2010, 134). Hence, this inseparable link has always ensured the life and survival of Islamic calligraphy.

3- Calligraphy Specificity is an Identity-building Factor

From one point of view, the visual distinction of the Islamic calligraphic alphabet, which has been understandable in its own field of civilization, has not been as influential against Western examples as other arts such as painting and architecture. This alphabet, which was the result of evolution and long coexistence with the language of the people of this civilization, could not be easily changed. This form of visualization of the Islamic calligraphic alphabet was one of the features that Islamic artists used as an identity-maker against the various Western arts and techniques. In other words, the “search for identity” described gave artists a return to their Islamic roots and found what they saw as distinct from Western culture in calligraphy. On the other hand, the calligraphic letters that have been used in Islamic civilization for centuries have become a special cultural significance beyond its original purpose of transmission of the message. Also, after five decades of following international styles in sculpture and painting, modern Islamic artists, succeeded in developing a new aesthetic with which they could identify: distinguish from Western culture, found themselves in the form of a school of calligraphy and were able the calligraphic school of art. Their western- orient training has served them well in drawing upon their Islamic cultural background (Ali, 1997, 185).

4- Fusion with the treasure of wisdom, literature, and humanities

With the growth of calligraphy and writing of the Qur’an as the first writing revolution that shows the process of Arab transition from basic speech to basic writing, calligraphy became more important after the arrival of Qur’an, since the Prophet (PBUH) changed the role of poetry from tribal

virtues to virtues to promote the religion (Adunis, 2013, 32). This type of poetry was also compatible with calligraphy, and Islamic civilization went through the stages of growth and prosperity in sync with literature. The recommendation of the Qur’an and the order of the Prophet (PBUH) to learn science and write and record it marked the scientific movement of Muslims in the first centuries of Islam. Also, the need to spread science in the Islamic world through translations of various books in the fields of medicine, wisdom, literature, and humanities as well as translations of works of predecessors, facilitated more need for calligraphy. This translation movement was in the golden age of Abbasids and Andalusia (Jan Ahmadi, 2000, 150).

5- Continuity of Creativity in Calligraphy and Adaptability to other Islamic Arts

Due to the history of a deep and long evolution and the tendency of the elites of society (religious thinkers) to this art, Islamic calligraphy has undergone stages of transformation and profound evolution, which has led to the invention of various and sometimes decorative forms. Calligraphy in Islamic civilization, whenever it has reached a point of saturation, has been created by calligraphic artists and elites in a new form of calligraphy, which is a testament to its continuity throughout the history of this traditional art. The first brilliant examples of these creations can be seen in Kufic lines. There are so many variations and forms of this type of line but identifying all the examples requires independent research (Sahragard, 2020, 14). The ductility of some lines has been used not only for ease of reading but also for its application in other Islamic arts in such a way that in the mass of twists, the text has remained hidden and has become of secondary importance. Various shapes and forms and visual capabilities that are seen in calligraphy, including Siahmashg (mixed exercises), left writing, simultaneous, overwriting, color writing and composition in geometric and free forms calligraphy tactics. As a factor related to

other Islamic arts has continued. Therefore, during the Islamic civilization, it has been able to take its place on various platforms of everyday life items such as pottery, lamps, etc. to large inscriptions in the mosques or the huge minaret, while preserving the content of the message, its use, and purposes. Find it beautiful and convenient. Calligraphy versatility in Neishabour pottery (Fig. 2) is a clear example of Islamic calligraphy adaptability.

The use of calligraphic letters in contemporary visual art also has not only a single purpose but also many purposes. Its most important goal is to direct the process of artistic innovation towards a cultural quality that connects the artist to a credible basis, which recognizes his nationalism and leads him to the land and its natural surroundings. This process also allows the artist to use the flexibility of Arabic letters, which is known for their beautiful shape and flexibility; like a song that can be played on various musical instruments to create a flexible view, which brings the subject closer to purity and abstraction, without ignoring its content or destroying its meaning (Hamudi, 2018, 362).

6- Artistic calligraphy based on traditional and religious teachings

Although traditional Islamic arts are all based on religious teachings and Islamic traditions, none seems to have received as much attention as the art of calligraphy. The importance and dignity of writing in the divine book has been emphasized in the Qur'an, especially in the chapters of Al-Alaq and Qalam. Moreover, in the holy hadiths and narrations attributed to the reliable sources, beautiful writing has highly been encouraged and its rewards are as elated as going to *Ferdows* or heaven. Therefore, calligraphy and calligraphers have had a special place in Islamic culture and civilization since calligraphy was considered a form of worship. For the fact that among Shiia mystics and Sufis, there is a strong inclination for calligraphy and practice. For instance: Darwish Abdolmajid Taleghani, was in fact one of the



Fig. 2. Pottery bowl engraved with Kufi calligraphy, Neishabour, probably of Samani period. Source: Komaroff, 2016.

famous Safavid calligrapher (1150-1185). From the middle Ages onwards, treatises on the background and artistic capabilities of calligraphy have been written, which contain theoretical teachings on the acquisition of virtues and combating vices to the attributes of calligraphy tools and implements. What emerges from the texts of these treatises and photo letters, from making ink, paperwork, to the system of teaching and learning in calligraphy and student hierarchy and obtaining a license, are all rooted in religious and traditional teachings (Fazaeli, 2013, 27). Hence, a change in the traditional arts, especially the art of calligraphy, seemed almost impossible. Because the change in calligraphy was a change in tradition, it did not seem easy. If there has been an evolution in calligraphy, it has been related to its aesthetics in its context. Changes were made in the forms of Islamic calligraphy for writing the Holy Quran for the authority to write the word of revelation" (Komaroff, 2016, 65). Therefore, its re-use in modern art reconciled Islamic artists with its most important heritage and great traditions. It also provided a space for us to once again express a philosophical concept of artists' attitudes toward existence.

Conclusion

Islamic calligraphy, like other traditional arts, was marginalized in the changes of the traditional and social system of Islamic societies in the face of the West and modernity. Due to the specificity and understanding of this art in its field of civilization and inconsistency with Western examples in the shadow of resistance theory in postcolonial studies, the attention of elites and Islamic intellectuals to the prevailing atmosphere of returning to self and the search for identity by artists and refused the principles of western academism. Calligraphy regained its place as a feature of Islamic art. The return to the heritage and culture and the recognition of this art on its own merit and not external factors, is one of the achievements of postcolonial studies and has played a significant role in protecting traditional and indigenous arts from colonial culture. As history has shown, recognizing the capabilities and nature of Islamic calligraphy, the attention of Shiite mystics and Sufis as well as the elites and utilization of calligraphy's visual capabilities as well as practical development of this art along with other Islamic arts, have resulted in the continuity and diversity of this art. Furthermore, the emergence of species, it forms as well as its deep connection with the divine word, transcendent wisdom and literature and recognition of its beauty based on its own culture, has protected the Islamic calligraphy from being overtaken by the West, from the Imperialism and colonialism and has survived all rival cultures. Hence, such perseverance can be called a symbol of resistance. In other words, along with the nature and objectivity of calligraphy, connection with the divine word and replication of the Qur'an has been the most important factor in its immunity in the Islamic civilization.

Islamic calligraphy, therefore, in the contemporary era has created new visual effects in new forms such as painting-calligraphy (calligraphy-painting) without denying the place and importance of traditional calligraphy. Therefore, it can be stated

that if Islamic calligraphy is utilizing its creative aspects and has a rational relationship with the teachings of its tradition, it will maintain its originality and identity and it will stand the test of time. Islamic calligraphy can be presented as the symbol of art for Islamic societies visa-a-visa the world and cultural of the world.

Reference list

- The Holy Quran.
- Abdullahi, M. (2018). Che bashad anche khanandash "Falsafeh-ye Eslami"? [What is it called "Islamic philosophy"?]. *Sophia Perenis*, 33, 233-260.
- Adunis (Ali Ahmad Said). (2013). *A Study of Creativity and Adherence in Arabs* (H. Abbasi, Trans.). Tehran: Sokhan.
- Afshar Mohajer, K. (2000). *Sayeh-ye Tooba* (Collection of biennial articles on Islamic paintings). Tehran: Museum of Contemporary Art.
- Ali, W. (1997). *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity*. Florida: University Press of Florida.
- Ansari, M. & Darroudi, M. (2014). Post-Colonial studies: Two different approaches. *Contemporary Political Studies*, 5(12), 1-23.
- Blair, Sh. S. (2006). *Islamic Calligraphy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bolkhari Ghahi, H. (2019). *Nazariyeh-ye Tajalli; Dar bab-e Shamayelgorizi-ye Honar-e Eslami* [The Theory of Manifestation; On the Iconoclasm of Islamic Art]. Tehran: Daftar-e Nashr-e Farhang-e Eslami.
- Ettinghausen, R. & Graber, O. (1999). *The Art and Architecture of Islam* (Y. Azhand, Trans.). Tehran: Samat.
- Fazaeli, H. (2013). *Atlas-e Khat: Tahghigh dar Khotut-e Eslami* [Atlas of Research in Islamic Calligraphy]. Tehran: Soroush.
- Hamudi, J. (2018). The diasporic divide: An Arab artist between Damascus and Berlin. In A. Lenssen, S. Rogers & N. Shabout (Eds.), *Modern art in the Arab World: Primary Documents* (pp. 361-2). New York: The Museum of Modern Art.
- Jan Ahmadi, F. (2000). Nehzat-e tarjomeh; Natayej va peyamadha-ye an [Translation movement; it's results and consequences]. *History of Islam*, 4, 146-158.
- Komaroff, L. (2016). *Beauty and Identity: Islamic Art from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
- Moin, M. (2003). *Moin Encyclopedic Dictionary*. Tehran: Dabir.

- Mokhtari, M., & Dehghani, A. (2016). Analysis of Middle East social movements with emphasis on Edward Saeed's East studies components. *Political Sociology of the Islamic World*, 3(7), 89-112.
- Mousavi Rokni, S. M. (2016). Critique of the traditionalist view of the beginnings of the art of Islamic calligraphy. *Bagh-e Nazar*, 13(38), 61-68
- Mousavi, S. S. & Darroudi, M. (2013). A Critical Attitude on Postcolonial Studies and Its Approaches. *Interdisciplinary in Humanities*, 5(1), 39-74.
- Mozaffari, A., Asadian, M. & Sharifi, F. (2017). Post-colonial discourse in world literature (discourse analysis of roots). *Media Studies*, 12(38), 19-36.
- Naef, S. (2003). Reexploring Islamic art: Modern and contemporary creation in the Arab world and its relation to the artistic past. *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 43, 164-174.
- Nasr, S. H. (1996). *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (R. Qasemian, Trans.). Tehran: Office of Religious Art Studies.
- Renda, G., Grabar, O. & Pınar, S. (1988). *A History of Turkish Painting*. Seattle & London: University of Washington Press.
- Sa'ed, E. (2011). *Orientalism* (L. Khonji, Trans.). Tehran: Amirkabir.
- Sahragard, M. (2020). *Satr-e Mastour (Tarikh va Sabkshenasi-ye Kufi-ye Sharghi)* [*Satr-e Mastour* (History and Style of Eastern Kufi)]. Tehran: Iranian Academy of Arts.
- Schimmel, A. (2010). *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* (A. Azad, Trans.). Tehran: Astan-e Quds-e Razavi.

COPYRIGHTS

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with publication rights granted to the Bagh-e Nazar Journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Amani, H., Bolkhari Ghahi, H. & Jabbari Kalkhoran, S. (2021). Islamic Calligraphy, a Symbol of Resistance to the Process of Westernization (Based on the Theory of Postcolonial Studies). *Bagh-e Nazar*, 18(100), 23-34.

DOI: 10.22034/bagh.2021.249115.4670

URL: http://www.bagh-sj.com/article_135541.html?lang=en

