



## 'ABBĀSĪ, ŠAYḲ

'ABBĀSĪ, ŠAYḲ, a Safavid miniature painter, whose known works include seventeen signed and dated examples executed between the years 1060/1650 and 1095/1683-84. Throughout his career it was his normal practice to sign his paintings with an obsequious formula which was written in minute characters, usually in a small rectangular panel of uncolored paper placed within the foreground vegetation. This reads: *bahā gereft čo gardīd šayḲ 'abbāsī*, "It (or he) achieved worth because he became ŠayḲ 'Abbāsī," i.e., he, or his work, gained value because his patron Shah 'Abbās II had permitted him to use the *nesba* 'Abbāsī.

Apart from an apparently early work in the standard Isfahan style of the second quarter of the 17th century (Cristie's 10 July 1975, lot 197), ŠayḲ 'Abbāsī departed from the established conventions of Safavid painting and embarked upon an eclectic manner in which European and Indian elements played an important role. He was thus one of the forerunners of the trend in Iranian painting which later developed into the Qajar style. Eleven other paintings attributable to him have their inscriptions erased (Walters Art Gallery, MS 668, fols. 4v, 5r, 10v, 11r, 18v, 22v, 57r, 60v; Reza Library, Romper, album 5, fol. 15; Metropolitan Museum of Art, 30.95.174 [34]; and Topkapi Saray, H. 2142, fol. 25v). His style is also seen in approximately two dozen other paintings attributable to him or his associates and followers.

In his early work, typified by the painting of an acrobat and tambourine player in the Chester Beatty Library (Mughal MS 47-14; see [Plate I](#)), ŠayḲ 'Abbāsī uses a soft restricted palette in which the background paper is only



partly covered with pigment. The figures are stiffly posed with smoothly graded modeling and extremely finely stippled faces, triangular in shape, often with darkly accented eyes and a cloying sweetness of expression. His landscape backgrounds are often distant Italianate towns among wooded hills. At a later date he uses stock conventions such as a stream flowing past a stylized tree, or a fountain gushing from a lion-mask carved in the side of an outcrop of rock. Generally his original stylistic tendencies are maintained in his later works, but faces are at times more heavily stippled or more coarsely rendered.

Unlike his contemporaries, Moḥammad Zamān and ‘Alī-qolī Jobba-dār, he does not directly copy European subjects and he shows very little direct understanding of the principles of European painting, of which his knowledge may have been partly gained from Turkish models. Similarly his attempts at portraying Indian subjects towards the end of his career show little familiarity with Indian costume details or Indian pictorial style. His most successful essay in the Indian manner is a lightly tinted drawing of a prince riding an elephant with retinue, dated 1086/1675-76, in the Musée Guimet (no. 7166).

With the exception of a group of illustrations from an unidentified manuscript, ŠayĶ ‘Abbāsī’s works are mainly album paintings, including portraits of rulers (Shah ‘Abbās II and Shah Solaymān), equestrian subjects, the Virgin and Child, youths and ladies posed in landscapes or picnicking and listening to music. His two sons, Moḥammad Taqī and ‘Alī Naqī, were also painters and modeled their styles on that of their father.

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Plate I. *Miniature Painting of an Acrobat and a Tambourine Player by Šayḵ ‘Abbāsī* (The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, MS 47-14)