



'ABDALLĀH HERAVĪ

'ABDALLĀH HERAVĪ, ŠEHĀB-AL-DĪN (“Ṭabbāḳ” or “Āšpaz”), mid-8th/15th century calligrapher active in Herat, Samarqand, and Mašhad. His major contribution appears to have been in designing monumental inscriptions for the Timurids, but he seems also to have worked as a gilder in the manuscript ateliers. A native of Herat, he apparently became a member of the Timurid court workshop during the reign of Šāhroḳ. 'Abd-al-Razzāq Samarqandī mentions him along with Aḏhar and Shaikh Maḥmūd as the principal students of Ja'far Tabrīzī in a list of the notable figures associated with Bāysonḳor b. Šāhroḳ (*Maṭla' al-sa'dayn*, fol. 614a). Ḳvāndamīr also links 'Abdallāh with Aḏhar and Shaikh Maḥmūd as students of Ja'far in his listing of the principal associates of Šāhroḳ (*Ḥabīb al-sīar* [Tehran] IV, p. 19). Apart from the praising the high level of accomplishment of 'Abdallāh, these two accounts give little indication of his precise contribution. Fortunately further indications of his activities given by Qāzī Aḥmad and Dūst Moḥammad, when combined with documentary and historical evidence, provide a general framework for his biography.

The only description of how 'Abdallāh became attached to Ja'far, and presumably through him to the Timurid court workshop, is that found in an anonymous mid-16th century *taḏkera* cited by M. Bayānī (*Ḳošnevīsān* II, pp. 360-61). Here he is described as the son of a cook who had a shop in the bazaar of Herat. One day he was asked to deliver food to the students working in Ja'far Tabrīzī's workshop. Feeling attracted by the scribal profession, he resolved to join the workshop. Once part of the workshop, his talents were



soon apparent, and Ja‘far encouraged the youth and later allowed ‘Abdallāh to marry his daughter. This account, which may well be legendary, suggests that his epithet “the Cook” (Ṭabbāk, Āšpaz) derives from the profession for which the youth was being trained. It is possible that he or his father performed this function in one of the Timurid households. The earliest surviving colophon signed by ‘Abdallāh is dated to 830/1430 (*ibid.*, p. 363). Qāzī Aḥmad claims that the calligraphy of ‘Abdallāh is found on “most of the buildings of Herat, especially Gāzorgāh” (p. 27; tr., p. 66). The latter would appear to be a reference to the structure erected around the tomb of ‘Abdallāh Anṣārī on the order of Šāhroḡ between 829/1425 and 830/1426. If ‘Abdallāh had a major share in the planning or execution of inscriptions for this structure, it would suggest that he was an active member of the Timurid atelier by at least 829/1425. ‘Abdallāh appears to have remained in Herat during the 830s and 840s and may well have participated in the decoration of buildings erected by the Timurid family during this time. In addition to the preparation of architectural inscriptions, he was noted for his skill in *afšān*, gold sprinkling, and *vaṣṣālī*, the joining of two pieces of paper (*ibid.*). Both techniques were used in the preparation of luxurious manuscripts.

The record of ‘Abdallāh’s movements aids the reconstruction of events between the death of Šāhroḡ in 850/1447 and the accession of Ḥosayn Bāqarā in 873/1469. According to Dūst Moḥammad (p. 27-28) after the death of Bāysonḡor in 873/1433 the artists he had patronized came under the protection of his son ‘Alā’-al-dawla. When Uluḡ Beg defeated ‘Alā’-al-dawla b. Bāysonḡor in Du’l-qa‘da, 851/January, 1448, “Mawlānā Šehāb-al-dīn ‘Abdallāh and Mawlānā Ṣāhīr-al-dīn Aḡhar and the other members of the Ketābkhāna” were taken to Samarḡand. There he ordered them to prepare a history of his own time and showered them with kindness “day by day even hour by hour.” An examination of the brief reign of Uluḡ Beg (d. Ramaḡān, 853/October, 1449) suggests that he had few opportunities to exercise close supervision over artists in his employ. Nevertheless the general outlines of the story given by Dūst Moḥammad may well be correct. While less significant than his reburial of Šāhroḡ in the Gūr-e Mīr, the transplantation of the Timurid atelier to Samarḡand would certainly be in harmony with Uluḡ Beg’s aim of restoring his capital to the position of eminence it had held during the lifetime of Tīmūr. The presence of members of the Timurid atelier in Samarḡand is to suggest not only by Dūst Moḥammad’s statements but also by colophons signed by ‘Abdallāh and Aḡhar, along with a document now in Istanbul which describes the operation of a workshop. An undated colophon written by Aḡhar at



Samarqand contains a dedication to Sultan Abū Saʿīd (*Ḳošnevīsān* I, p. 69). It must have been copied between Jomādā I, 855/June, 1451 and 863/1459, when Abū Saʿīd transferred the seat of his government to Herat. Colophons show that ʿAbdallāh Heravī was in Samarqand between 854/1450 and 859/1455, so that his period of activity also coincides with that of Abū Saʿīd, although he appears to have been in the city slightly before the latter's victory (*ibid.*, II, pp. 363-64).

The most significant indication of the activity of major figures of the Timurid atelier in Samarqand comes in a document now in Istanbul. It is clearly a report to the patron of a workshop on the accomplishments of his employees. From their names, the major figures Amīr Ḳalīl, Ḳvāja ʿAlī, Ġiāṭ-al-dīn, Šams-al-dīn, and Šehāb-al-dīn (presumably Šehāb-al-dīn ʿAbdallāh) would appear to be members of the Timurid atelier active during the period of Šāhroḳ and Bāysonqor (Kemal Özergin, pp. 471-518). Internal evidence within the document suggests, however, that it comes from Samarqand rather than Herat. The place names contained in it, Bāḡ-e Maydān and Bāḡ-e Now, are garden palaces in the vicinity of Samarqand. Considering the other available evidence, one may conclude that the transplantation of the Timurid atelier to Samarqand mentioned by Dūst Moḡammad did in fact occur. It is certain that the key members of the workshop were there during the time of Abū Saʿīd, and there is at present no evidence to contradict Dūst Moḡammad's statement that they were brought there at the command of Uluḡ Beg. In the document Šehāb-al-dīn is working on illuminated frontispieces for various manuscripts, adding gilding to the illuminated or painted pages (*ibid.*, pp. 485, 490, 494). This activity would seem to be in harmony with Qāzī Aḡmad's description of him as a specialist in "gold-sprinkling."

Toward the end of his career, ʿAbdallāh Heravī returned to his native city. M. Bayānī cites colophons mentioning the city of Herat signed by ʿAbdallāh which are dated between 860/1456 and 873/1469. A manuscript now in Leningrad, dated 877-82/1472-77, shows that he continued to be active during the reign of Ḳosayn Bāyqarā (*Ḳošnevīsān* II, pp. 362-64.). Although little is known of his work during these years, a remark by Qāzī Aḡmad (p. 27, tr., p. 66) suggests that he worked in Mašhad, executing projects for Ḳosayn Bāyqarā, since he mentions a building there named after "Āḡāča, the wife of Ḳosayn Mīrzā," which has inscriptions written by ʿAbdallāh Heravī. Āḡāča was a title used by concubines at the court of Ḳosayn Bāyqarā, and the names of three of his favorites are known: Laṭīfa Solṭān Āḡāča, Pāpā Āḡāča, and Bibī Āḡāča. It is not



known which of them should be connected with the building in Mašhad, no do any traces of the building appear to have survived. Another link between ‘Abdallāh and Mašhad is the work there of his pupil ‘Abd-al-Ḥaqq Sabzavārī, who composed inscriptions on the dome of the tomb of Imam Rezā, according to the testimony of Qāzī Aḥmad (p. 32; tr., p. 72).

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