



‘ABDALLĀH KHAN

‘**ABDALLĀH KHAN**, court painter, b. ca. 1770; d. ca. 1850. Very little is known of him personally. R. Murdoch Smith, who had access to reliable oral sources, wrote that he “died at a great age in the beginning of the present Shah’s reign” (sc. Nāṣer-al-dīn, acc. 1848; *Persian Art*, London, 1876, p. 78). William Price, who accompanied Sir Gore Ouseley’s embassy in 1812, notes under May 13th of that year: “Called upon Akabdool (sc. Āqā ‘Abdallāh [Khan], Nakoshbashee [*naqqāšbāšī*] head painter to the shah; he shewed several portraits of the royal family, khans, etc.” (*Journal of the British Embassy to Persia*, London, 1832, p. 36). ‘Abdallāh’s most celebrated work was the great fresco covering three walls of the audience hall in the Negārestān Palace, which formerly stood next to the Maydān-e Mašq, or Drill Square, Tehran. The original is now lost, but a full-scale copy was made in 1904 and now hangs in the Persian Foreign Office; and several reduced copies were made for European envoys and visitors, one of which was engraved in London, 1834, by Robert Havell (see B. W. Robinson, *Persian Paintings in the India Office Library*, London, 1976, nos. 1280-83, where further references will be found). The painting comprises a total of 118 life-size figures; on the end wall was Fath-‘Alī Shah enthroned and attended by twelve of his sons and six *golāms* carrying the royal shield, etc., and on the side walls a double row of courtiers above and foreign envoys and guards below. Among the latter are Sir John Malcolm, Sir Harford Jones, and Sir Gore Ouseley on the one side, and on the other General Gardanne, M. Jaubert, and M. Jouannin. In spite of an inscription, noted by Brown, dating the work to 1228/1813 and stating it was executed by ‘Abdallāh Khan, Curzon attributed it to Moḥammad Ḥasan Khan (*Persia and the Persian Question*, London, 1892, I,



p. 338). His error was followed by Schulz (*Die persisch-islamische Miniaturmalerei*, Leipzig, 1914, I, p. 196).

‘Abdallāh Khan is also credited with an impressive pair of frescoes at Karaĵ, in what was formerly the Solaymāniya Palace (now the Government Agricultural College), which are thus described by Lady Sheil (*Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia*, London, 1856, p. 115): “At one end of the apartment was a large fresco painting, full size of Fetteh Ali Shah in regal array, with a numerous party of his sons standing around him... At the other extremity of the room was another painting of still greater attraction. It represented Agha Mahommed Khan, the founder of the Kajjar dynasty, surrounded by the chiefs of his tribe who helped him to the sovereignty of Persia... The likenesses of the chiefs are said to be excellent, and that of Agha Mahommed Khan himself is inimitable. The former are fine, sturdy, determined-looking warriors. Agha Mahommed looks like a fiend. The atrocious, cold, calculating ferocity which marked the man is stamped on his countenance.” A full length life-size portrait of Faḥ-‘Alī Shah in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (no. 707-1876) is reliably attributed to ‘Abdallāh Khan on the authority of Murdoch Smith. The king is represented standing, wearing a red robe and an astrakhan cap adorned with diamonds and an aigrette. Other oil paintings might perhaps be attributed to him on stylistic grounds, such as the two enormous canvases of Faḥ-‘Alī Shah’s sons (formerly on the market in London and Paris ; one secured by the Negārestān Museum, Tehran) which must have originally flanked a central section depicting the king himself. But the court style of the time was remarkably homogeneous, and such attributions must be regarded as extremely tentative. No evidence has so far come to light on the relationship between ‘Abdallāh Khan and his two former colleagues, Mīrzā Bābā and Mehr ‘Alī, the former of whom also enjoyed the title of *naqqāšbāšī*. Unlike them, ‘Abdallāh does not appear to have worked in other media, such as lacquer and enamel, but to have confined himself to painting in oils.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.