



‘ABDALLĀH

‘ABDALLĀH, name appearing on four diverse, high-quality silks of the first half of the 17th century. While ‘Abdallāh could refer to a designer or weaver, it is more likely that he was a workshop entrepreneur who ordered a variety of silks inscribed with his name (the equivalent of 20th century labels). This is suggested by the structural and stylistic diversity of the four silks, three of which have motifs prominent in European and Mughal drawing. The patterns, drawing, and scale appear to parallel and be adapted from contemporary artistic styles. One ‘Abdallāh silk ranks with the most extraordinary of all Safavid silks, the polychrome velvets, woven with as many as nine colors—a feat unequaled elsewhere. All four silks are fine examples of the quality in structure, drawing, and color (now often faded) that made Safavid silks famous internationally.

Three of the silks with the inscription “‘Abdallāh” have dense compositions (nos. 1, 2, 4, below), which were fashionable in Safavid silk patterning by the time of ‘Abbās I. Since the fabrics probably were draped, only parts of the patterns would usually be visible at a given time—a significant factor in determining pattern layout and design density. In these three silks only elements of the pattern, rather than the entire composition, are dependent on painting styles. The motifs may have been taken by a designer from sketchbooks and assembled to be woven. Thus in no. 1 varied animals, while not part of the dominant theme, are charming space fillers and contribute to the pattern’s overall appearance. In no. 2 the poses and interrelated placement of figures show the expertise of a textile designer able to incorporate the



repeats inherent in weaving, which are complemented by the large-scale flora. In no. 4 the repetition of a small scene, in a scale typical of miniature paintings, causes a dense appearance. In contrast, the floral landscape in no. 3 is more open, consistent with the monumental scale of the standing figure (.61 m high), and suggests an affiliation with wall or oil paintings.

The silks are: 1. Brocaded silk; a compound weave patterned by weft floats in diagonal alignment on a warp (4/1) satin ground. A horseman looks over his shoulder at his lassoed prisoner, who walks on a densely covered ground (animals, plants, pond with duck, rocks). The inscription occurs on the river’s quiver in kufic script. The pattern unit (.255 m by .23 m) is repeated in rows which face opposite directions. (See A. Welch, *Shah ‘Abbas and the Arts of Isfahan*, New York, 1973, fig. 23; M. Aga-Oglu, *Exhibition of Islamic Art*, San Francisco, 1937, no. 212, illus.; *Survey of Persian Art*, Pl. 1044A.)

2. Brocaded silk with the same structure as no. 1. A standing man with crossed ankles appears to be dancing to the music of a seated *ūd* player and a kneeling tambourinist, while a fourth man offers him a cup. Large fanciful blossoms and leaves grow from rocks and fill all interstitial spaces. Some of the men are dressed in European clothing. The inscription, in large *naskī* script, occurs on the tambourine. The pattern (.18 m high) is repeated directly. (See Welch, op. cit., fig. 22; *Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 1044B.)

3. Large personage velvet; the structure is warp velvet patterning with background areas originally covered with metal strips (wefts) on a warp satin foundation. A standing woman (.61 m high) holds a bottle and a cup in either hand in a landscape of flowering trees and plants. Her shoulder-length hair is adorned with strings of spaced pearls which suggest European influence. Strips of gilt metal cover her radiant face. The inscription occurs in kufic on the bottle. (See M. Dreger in F. Sarre and F. R. Martin, *Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerken Muhammedanischer Kunst in München 1910*, no. 2347, Taf. 192; F. R. Martin, *Figurale Persischer Stoffe*, Stockholm, 1899, Taf. IV; *Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 1043.)

4. Lightweight silk in double cloth weave (which is typically reversible and in two colors, here a striking salmon and yellow). Two men in a pavilion look out on two men holding gazelles, while two monkeys sit in trees; the dominant motifs show Mughal style and iconography. The kufic inscription occurs beneath the pavilion. The pattern unit (.138 m by .08 m) is repeated in mirror image, in staggered rows. (See A. Weibel, *Two Thousand Years of Textiles*, New



York, 1952, pl. 139; *Survey of Persian Art*, p. 2102, fig. 681; N. A. Reath and E. B. Sachs, *Persian Textiles*, New Haven, 1937, pl. 38.)

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Given in the text.