



## ĠAFFĀRĪ, ABU'L-ḤASAN KHAN

**ABU'L-ḤASAN KHAN ĠAFFĀRĪ**, ṢANĪ'-AL-MOLK (1814-66), painter in oils and miniature, lacquer artist, and book illustrator. He was the eldest son of Mīrzā Moḥammad Ġaffārī, and great-nephew of Abu'l-Ḥasan Mostawfī, the first of a line of Kāšān painters. In 1829 he was a pupil of the best of Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah's court painters, Mehr-'Alī. During the next decade he made rapid progress, and in 1842 an oil portrait of Moḥammad Shah secured him a position as a court artist. His style by now was formed; in oil painting it was refinement on that of Mehr-'Alī; but his miniature paintings and portraits show originality, naturalism, and technical perfection (see [Plate XIV](#)). Between 1846 and 1850 he was in Italy, studying and copying the works of the Italian masters in Rome, the Vatican, Florence, and Venice.

In 1850 Abu'l-Ḥasan returned to Iran and was appointed *naqqāšbāšī* in succession to Moḥammad Ebrāhīm; he was also concerned with the [Dār al-Fonūn](#), which Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah was establishing in Tehran. This originally had been planned by the brilliant vizier Mīrzā Taqī Khan, Amīr Kabīr, but was not completed till after his cruel and untimely death in 1852. Abu'l-Ḥasan spent the year 1853 designing and supervising the execution of the 1,134 pages of miniature painting that adorn the stupendous six-volume Persian translation of the *Arabian Nights* (*Hazār o yok šab*) now in Golestān Library; a team of thirty-four painters worked under him. Another large commission, the Neẓāmīya murals (now in the Īrān Bāstān Museum, Tehran) occupied him and his pupils four years later. Obviously inspired by 'Abdallāh Khan's celebrated frescoes in the Negārestān Palace, these represent Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah



enthroned with his sons and ministers and attended by numerous courtiers and foreign envoys. In 1861 he was made director of printing and editor of the official government periodical. Under his direction it improved enormously in appearance and was given a new name, *Rūz-nāma-ye dawlat-e 'aliya-ye Īrān*; to it he contributed a masterly series of finely lithographed portraits of princes and statesmen and, occasionally, representations of noteworthy current events. In his latter years he seems to have been occupied more with administration than with painting. On 19 May 1861 he was invested with the title of Ṣanī'-al-molk, by which he is commonly known, and given a building in which to establish his own school of painting. His responsibility was again increased in 1864, when he became supervisor of all the printing establishments in the country; in 1866 he was put in charge of three more official journals and made under-secretary in the ministry of science. Whether this enormous burden of responsibility proved too much for him, or whether there was some physical cause, is not clear; but later in the same year Abu'l-Ḥasan died, one of the ablest and most honored artists Persia had produced. His forte was undoubtedly portraiture, in which his brilliant and sometimes merciless characterizations often seem to bring us face-to-face with the subject.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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