



AḤMAD MŪSĀ

AḤMAD MŪSĀ, 8th/14th century painter. Despite the prominence given him in modern scholarly writing, he remains a vague figure. All evidence which can be called “documentary” stems from a single source—the album of Bahrām Mīrzā b. Shah Esmā‘īl now in the Topkapı Saray Library, Istanbul, Hazine 2154. Compiled in 961/1554 by Bahrām’s court librarian, Dūst Moḥammad, the album contains both a prefatory essay concerning the evolution of calligraphy and painting, and samples to illustrate the essay’s points. Dūst Moḥammad briefly describes the legendary past of the art of painting and then turns to the reign of the Il-khanid ruler, Abū Sa‘īd. Under his patronage Aḥmad Mūsā “withdrew the covering from the face of painting and invented the kind of painting which is current at the present time” (L. Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson, B. Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, Oxford, 1933, pp. 139, 184). As examples of Aḥmad Mūsā’s work he cites two volumes on the dynastic history of the Mongols (a *Čangīz-nāma* and an *Abū Sa‘īd-nāma*), a *Kalīla wa Demna*, and a *Me‘rāj-nāma* copied by a certain “Mawlānā ‘Abdallāh,” who is possibly to be identified with ‘Abdallāh Šayrafī, a well-known calligrapher active during the reign of Abū Sa‘īd. The album itself contains portions of ten paintings from a *Me‘rāj-nāma*, four of which are ascribed to Aḥmad Mūsā. Dūst Moḥammad presumably identified these *Me‘rāj-nāma* paintings with the ones he had mentioned in his essay. He makes Aḥmad Mūsā a key figure of 8th/14th century painting, suggesting links with earlier painters by mentioning that Aḥmad studied with his father, and connecting him with later trends through his pupils, two of whom are mentioned: Amir Dawlat Yār, a slave of Sultan Abū Sa‘īd, and Ostād Šams-al-dīn, who began his career in the reign of



the Jalayerid sultan Oways (757-76/1356-74), survived into that of Aḥmad (784-813/1382-1420), and taught ‘Abd-al-Ḥayy. Thus Aḥmad Mūsā may have been active for some decades after Abū Sa‘īd’s reign; his connection with Ostād Šams-al-dīn implies his survival until ca. 761/1360, if not later. By assuming a long career for Aḥmad Mūsā, it is possible to reconcile the stylistic characteristics of the *Me‘rāj-nāma* paintings in Hazine 2154 with their attribution to him. In the treatment of landscape and in the proportions of human figures, the paintings seem to fall between the *Garšāsp-nāma* of 755/1354 and manuscripts from the 1380s and 1390s such as B.M. Or. 13297 and Add. 18113, so that a date for the *Me‘rāj-nāma* paintings of ca. 761/1360 would be quite acceptable. Dūst Moḥammad’s mention of a *Kalīla wa Demna* manuscript painted by Aḥmad Mūsā has led to the attribution to him of paintings from a fragmentary manuscript of that work preserved in an album given to Shah Ṭahmāsb, now in the Istanbul University Library (F. 1422). Certain similarities can be found in the drawing of trees and rocks and in the proportions of human figures to link the *Me‘rāj-nāma* and *Kalīla wa Demna* paintings. Beyond these stylistic links (suggesting that the two groups of paintings are of similar date and provenance), there is little reason to connect the *Kalīla wa Demna* paintings with Aḥmad Mūsā. Attempts have also been made to link Aḥmad Mūsā with some of the paintings of a dispersed *Šāh-nāma* manuscript known after a former owner as the “Demotte” *Šāh-nāma*.

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