



## 'ALĪ B. SOLṬĀN-MOḤAMMAD

'ALĪ B. SOLṬĀN-MOḤAMMAD, MĪRZĀ, a master painter of the early Safavid period. 'Alī Čelebī, writing in 995/1586, numbers him among the leading masters of the age and singles out his talent as a designer (*Manāqeb-e honarvarān*, ed. Ī. Maḥmūd Kemāl, Istanbul, 1926). As the son of the illustrious painter Solṭān Moḥammad, he grew up in the *ketāb-kāna* of Shah Ṭahmāsp and had access to royal favor and the finest training from an early age (Qāzī Aḥmad, tr., p. 186). He was also connected by family ties with other members of the artistic elite at court. Mīrzā 'Alī was probably born between 906-16/1500-10 and died around 983/1575. His primary training as a painter must have come from his father, but his art also shows the influence of other masters, chiefly Behzād's student Šayqzāda and Āqā Mīrak.

Scholarly definition of early Safavid painting almost wholly depends upon the publications of S. C. Welch (*A King's Book of Kings*, New York, 1972; *Persian Painting*, New York, 1976; *The Houghton Shāhnāmah*, Cambridge, Mass., 1981), who has admirably delineated Mīrzā 'Alī's career and art. The master's development can be traced in six paintings (attributed to him by S. C. Welch) in the Houghton *Šāh-nāma*, produced under Shah Ṭahmāsp's active patronage between circa 929-50/1522-43 (fols. 18v, 295r, 339r, 402r, 638r, 731r). The only two paintings that bear his name ('*amal-e Ostād Mīrzā 'Alī*) are in the 945-49/1539-43 *Kamsa* of Neẓāmī in the British Museum (Or. 2265), where he was associated not only with his father but with other first- and second-generation Safavid artists. Mīrzā 'Alī's illustrations (fols. 48v and 77v) reveal a mastery of tradition, composition, and detail. They are spatially clear and



balanced, combining painstaking observation with a predilection for classical order. Their attention to nuances of costume, gesture, and setting makes them an important source for Safavid social, as well as esthetic, history. When Shah Ṭahmāsp ceased being an active patron of painting, Mīrzā ‘Alī, along with many of his contemporaries like Moḏaffar-‘Alī and Shaikh MoḤammad, was supported by the shah’s nephew Ebrāhīm Mīrzā, a celebrated connoisseur of painting and calligraphy. S. C. Welch has attributed to Mīrzā ‘Alī seven paintings from the *Haft awrang* of Jāmī (Freer Gallery of Art) done for that prince between 963-72/1556-65. They indicate the impact of a different patron, for they are full of spatial ambiguities, unstable movement, and an emotiveness far apart from the painter’s earlier art.

In this latter period of his career Mīrzā ‘Alī also produced a substantial number of single-page paintings, designed for inclusion in albums. Most of them are individual “portraits” of the elegant young men and women who people the court scenes of his manuscript illustrations. Both he and Shaikh MoḤammad established the basic iconography and style of this type of *moraqqa*’ page and exercised a profound influence on later Safavid masters of this genre like Reżā ‘Abbāsī and Ṣādeqī (see A. Welch, *Shah ‘Abbās and the Arts of Isfahan*, New York, 1973; idem, *Artists for the Shah*, New Haven, 1976).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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