



'ALĪ HERAVĪ

'ALĪ HERAVĪ, also known as MĪR 'ALĪ KĀTEB ḤOSAYNĪ, a calligrapher active in Herat, Mašhad, and Bukhara from the late 9/15th century to 951/1544-45. A specialist in the *nasta'liq* script, he excelled in its use for manuscripts, architectural inscriptions, and *qeṭ'as* (calligraphy specimens, often mounted as album pages); he also composed poetry in both Persian and Turkish with a penchant for chronograms, riddles, and occasional verse. He was born in Herat to a family of Ḥosaynī *sayyeds* ca. 881/1476, but his early life is obscure. Qāzī Aḥmad states that he had been trained in calligraphy at Mašhad first by a certain Zayn-al-dīn Maḥmūd, a student of Solṭān-'Alī Mašhadī, and later by the latter himself. Authors of *taḍkeras* have questioned this connection, but Mīr 'Alī's own statements corroborate it. Little is known about his activities in Herat. Writing in 896/1491, 'Alī Šīr Navā'ī refers to him as a "youth" who writes well and composes poetry in Persian and Turkish. In the *taḍkera* entitled *Qawā'id-e koṭūṭ va rayḥān*, composed in 969/1561-62, it is said that Mīr 'Alī worked in the Timurid *dār-al-enšā'* (correspondence bureau) copying *aḥkāms* (royal decrees). Since Mīr 'Alī occasionally uses the *nesba* "al-Solṭānī" in his colophons, M. Bayānī concluded that he had been connected with the court of Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā. But some of these colophons were written during Mīr 'Alī's residence in Bukhara when he was employed by 'Abd-al-'Azīz Khan, so it is possible that the *nesba* refers not to a political figure but to Solṭān-'Alī Mašhadī and that its use was intended to draw attention to Mīr 'Alī's link with the earlier scribe. Mīr 'Alī may have had some attachment to the Timurid dynasty, for he wrote verses praising Bābor as "the honor of Tīmūr's family." He may also have considered attaching himself to the Mughal court; his son



Moḥammad Bāqer moved to India and became associated with ‘Abd-al-Raḥīm Kān-e Kānān. Between the Safavid conquest of 911/1506 and the Uzbek/Safavid war of 934-35/1528-29, Mīr ‘Alī appears to have lived in Herat. He may have been associated with the Safavid official Ḥabīballāh Sāvaǰī (killed 932/1526), of whom he wrote a eulogy. M. Bayānī reproduces an obsequious letter addressed to a certain Ḥosayn Khan, perhaps Ḥosayn Khan Šāmlū, the effective ruler of Herat from 932-35/1525-29. Mīr ‘Alī may have played some role in the Safavid administration of Khorasan.

The pivotal event in Mīr ‘Alī’s life appears to be ‘Obayd Khan’s siege and eventual capture of Herat in Šafar, 936/October, 1529. Qāzī Aḥmad reports that Mīr ‘Alī was taken to Bukhara by the Uzbek ruler after the capture, but two manuscript colophons demonstrate that he was in Bukhara during the year 935; hence he must have left Herat during ‘Obayd Khan’s siege rather than after its conclusion. In Bukhara Mīr ‘Alī was the principal calligrapher of ‘Abd-al-‘Azīz b. ‘Obaydallāh (b. ca. 915/1509, d. 956/1549), whose atelier for the production of books included calligraphers, painters, and binders. Qāzī Aḥmad records a poem written by Mīr ‘Alī lamenting that his skill in calligraphy has led to his detention in Bukhara; several copies or variants are known signed by Mīr ‘Alī himself. Two are now in Istanbul: one in an album prepared for Shah Esmā‘īl, the other in an album arranged by Malek Daylamī. A third copy, dated to 944/1537-38, is in the *Moraqqa‘-e golšan*, an album assembled for Jahāngīr now in the Ketābkāna-ye Saṭṭanatī, Tehran. Despite the anguish conveyed in his poem, Mīr ‘Alī appears to have enjoyed considerable prestige in Bukhara. On ‘Obaydallāh’s accession to the khanate in the fall of 940/1533 Mīr ‘Alī composed a panegyric that is found in the *Moraqqa‘-e golšan* and ends with a chronogram, *walī-e molk* ‘Obaydallāh Khan, which is mentioned by historians. He also composed verses praising Mīr Moḥammad Bāqer Yamanī, known as Mīr-e ‘Arab, on the occasion of the construction of the latter’s *madrasa*; the concluding chronogram *madrasa-ye ‘ālī-e Mīr-e ‘Arab* yields the date 942/1535-36.

In reporting Mīr ‘Alī’s forced residence in Bukhara, Sām Mirzā and Qāzī Aḥmad imply that he remained in that city until his death; but Qāzī Aḥmad also records several inscriptions containing chronograms from the shrine of Imam Rezā at Mašhad written by Mīr ‘Alī during this period. In one of them the words *dahom-e Du‘l-qa‘da* yield both a day and a year, 10 Du‘l-qa‘da 938/15 June 1532; another concludes with *madḥ-e emām-e haštom* “Praise to the Eighth Imam” (i.e., 939/1532-33). At this time ‘Obaydallāh’s son ‘Abd-al-‘Azīz



was in control of Mašhad, where he remained from ca. Jomādā II, 938/January, 1532 until ca. Rabī' I, 940/October, 1533. It is likely that Mīr 'Alī accompanied him on this campaign and that the inscriptions in Mašhad record visits to the shrine on this occasion. Another colophon demonstrates that he visited Samarqand. Given his skill in chronograms, it is fitting that he is said to have composed one posthumously for himself and revealed it to a friend in a dream: Mīr 'Alī *fawt namūda* "Mīr 'Alī died" (951/1544-45). He was buried in Bukhara at Faṭḥābād near the tomb of Sayf al-dīn Bākārzī.

Mīr 'Alī's calligraphy was widely appreciated. Qāzī Aḥmad remarks the *moraqqa's*, *qeṭ'as*, and *noskas* by Mīr 'Alī are scattered "throughout the inhabited quarter of the world." Mīr 'Alī created a new *qānūn* or standard of proportion and wrote a treatise on calligraphy and prosody entitled *Madad al-koṭūṭ*. His most important student was his own son, Mīr Moḥammad Bāqer, who was active primarily in India. Pages in the *Moraqqa'-e golšan* preserve calligraphy exercises Mīr 'Alī wrote for his son's benefit. The son himself collected the father's calligraphy and poetry, assembling at least one album of his works. An album dedicated to Homāyūn now in the Topkapı Sarayı, Istanbul, contains calligraphy by both father and son. The best-known examples of Mīr 'Alī's calligraphy are those in two albums assembled for Jahāngīr: the *Moraqqa'-e golšan* and another in Berlin. In both of them pages of calligraphy, predominantly by Mīr 'Alī, alternate with paintings. At present the Tehran album contains ninety-nine examples of his work, the Berlin twenty-four; further pages in private and public collections may have come from the Berlin album. The album pages by Mīr 'Alī appear to include a compendium of his own verse as well as copies made at various dates, while the pages by other Herat scribes could have been in his possession. It is probable that the calligraphy pages in both Jahāngīr albums derive mainly from a single source; this may have been an album assembled either by Mīr 'Alī himself or by his son.

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