



'ALĪ-QOLĪ JOBBA-DĀR

'ALĪ-QOLĪ JOBBA-DĀR, painter active in Qazvīn and Isfahan during the late 11th/17th and early 12th/18th centuries. According to Loṭf-'Alī Beg Āḍar, author of *Ātaškada*, 'Alī-qolī Beg, known as Farangī, was a European convert to Islam who painted for the Safavids, while his son Moḥammad-'Alī Beg became *naqqāš-bāšī* under Nāder Shah. Dated works signed by 'Alī-qolī span the period 1084/1673-74 to 1129/1716-17. They use light and shade to model forms and arrange landscapes in linear perspective; both traits suggest contact with European artistic practice. The nucleus of 'Alī-qolī's work comes from an album of Indian and Persian paintings now in the Hermitage, Leningrad, but other paintings bearing his name are in a similar album in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1915.30.95); his name also appears on paintings from an album recently dispersed in auction. Isolated examples in private and public collections may have come from these or similar albums. Only the Leningrad album, which contains paintings based on European models and scenes depicting events in Iran, has been analyzed systematically, though many questions remain. Paintings bearing his name and executed in the style popular in Mughal India are also found in the Leningrad album as well as other collections, but their connection with 'Alī-qolī has been disputed by A. Ivanov. It is often assumed that 'Alī-qolī was a European painter who, like others, had come to Iran. His title *Jobba-dār* identifies him as an official of the *jobba-kāna* or armory; the Safavids sought the assistance of various Europeans in modernizing their military establishment, so 'Alī-qolī may have been one of them.



‘Alī-qolī’s paintings after European models lack visual or compositional coherence. Most ambitious is a scene in the Hermitage album where a standing man and woman flank a seated woman while above them an allegorical figure is framed by clouds; an inscription states that the work was painted by ‘Alī-qolī in Qazvīn during Şafar, 1085/May-June, 1674, and the costumes suggest a Netherlandish source of slightly earlier date. A French model has been suggested for a portrait of a youth in armor published by F. R. Martin; an abbreviated version of the same work appears on a lacquered papier-mâché pen case now in the Hermitage Museum. Italian elements are found in the depiction of an allegorical figure beside a fountain formerly in the Binney collection. A common feature of ‘Alī-qolī’s paintings after European models is the marked disjuncture of foreground and background space. Often the figures are placed on a shallow stage and silhouetted against a distant landscape. The spatial relation between figures and setting is often ambiguous, giving the paintings an awkward appearance. While ‘Alī-qolī appears to have been a skilled draftsman, he must have been trained somewhat cursorily as a painter. Perhaps he was indeed skilled in another craft and initially only pressed into service as a painter in order to make copies of European prints or paintings.

‘Alī-qolī’s paintings of Iranian subjects are more unified in composition and style than those with European themes. Especially important are two scenes in the Hermitage album with courtiers flanking a princely figure, perhaps Shah Solaymān (r. 1077-1105/1666-94). In the larger of the two the ruler smokes a pipe while being attended by a youth in European clothing; above the heads of two standing figures on the left are Georgian inscriptions. Youthful attendants hold the shah’s weapons or entertain him with music. In the smaller painting the ruler holds a cup while an attendant and courtier stand on his right. A Georgian inscription is found next to the shoulder of the courtier, who also figures prominently in the larger scene; he may have been one of the Georgian officials of the Safavids and his prominence in the paintings suggests that he may have commissioned them. In both instances the event occurs on the balcony of a residence, and a landscape can be seen in the background; in both ‘Alī-qolī’s signature is framed, once in a cartouche, the other time by a tambourine. Signatures framed by cartouches are found on two more of the Leningrad paintings and are a distinctive feature of ‘Alī-qolī’s work. The edges of the figures are clearly demarcated by lines, within which light and shade are used to suggest volume and the effects of light on various surfaces. A similar style is used in two outdoor scenes, both probably by ‘Alī-qolī, where a



ruler rides with his entourage or is seated selecting a horse from a herd. The same precise contours and shaded surfaces are found in two portraits of the same person bearing 'Alī-qolī's name. One, in the collection of Sadruddin Aga Khan, is dated to 1129/1716-17, making it the latest of 'Alī-qolī's dated works; the other, in the Metropolitan Museum (1915.30.95), is dated to 184, presumably an abbreviation for 1084/1673-74, making it the artist's earliest known painting. A third version of the same subject signed by Moḥammad Zamān bears a note that it was completed in 1129/1716-17 for the shah, presumably Ḥosayn (r. 1105-35/1694-1722). A close comparison of these paintings would be needed to determine whether the two bearing 'Alī-qolī's name with different dates appear to be by the same hand.

The existence of these three paintings similar in appearance brings up the question of the connection between the two painters. Other signed works by both artists have similar dates and are executed in a similar fashion, but it is not yet possible to determine who was the originator of the style. The often repeated statement that Moḥammad Zamān studied in Europe has been challenged by A. Ivanov, and no compelling evidence for his European journey has been produced. Were the works of 'Alī-qolī depicting European themes more accomplished, one might conclude that he was the originator of this style combining Persian and European elements; but the background and accomplishments of 'Alī-qolī are too little known to justify such a statement. More certain is the manner in which the style used by 'Alī-qolī and Moḥammad Zamān was continued by their successors, laying a foundation for the technique of painting that became popular during the Zand and Qajar periods, when it was particularly used for large-scale figure paintings. A painting by Moḥammad Zamān's son Moḥammad-'Alī of a royal reception draws heavily on the compositions used by 'Alī-qolī in the Leningrad paintings. Other paintings by 'Alī-qolī's descendants, in particular his son Moḥammad-'Alī, have yet to be identified, but perhaps they too continued his style.

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